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## Connecting People and the Environment: The Human Impacts Institute

*Happy 2011! To kick off the start of a new decade, we feature an excellent interview by former chief blogger and guest contributor Danielle Ravich with Tara Deporte, a leader grassroots sustainability leader and founder of The Human Impacts Institute. Here, Tara discusses her efforts to grow a holistic and inclusive movement that will address sustainability from all angles*

by Danielle Ravich

Tara Deporte has been one of NYC's most active grassroots sustainability leader I've had the opportunity to meet. Through her work at the Lower East Side Ecology center, Tara has extended her passion for sustainability through hosting numerous sustainability workshops, inspiring interns to become environmental leaders throughout NYC, advising local businesses how to use more sustainable practices, teaching middle school students to be environmental stewards, and participating in numerous local policy-making discussions. In her spare time, among others, Tara has worked on grassroots initiatives to support sustainable building programs, convincing building managers to allow composting, worked as an adjunct professor at the New School, and is also an artist.

It seems that collaboration and finding ways to integrate ideas to create solutions is at the cornerstone of what seems to make Tara a success. Her interests both locally and abroad, in addition to her hard work and the momentum she has built throughout the environmental community, has enabled her to house her work in one place: The Human Impacts Institute (<http://www.humanimpactsinstitute.org/>).

The Human Impacts Institute aims to foster sustainability and creativity through education, collaborative research and creative expression. It encompasses Tara's passions and represents the type of integrated thinking that creates real change.

The organization's strengths come from its ability to foster partnerships, and build a transparent holistic and inclusive movement to address sustainability from all angles. Tara has always been involved in a multitude of projects, and launching her own organization to see all of her visions through seemed to be a logical next step. She divided the organization's actions into four components:

- Experiential education--participants practice leadership through hands-on problem solving and community service. There are opportunities to learn and develop through working with organizations around the world, and even locally in New York City. Already, The Human Impacts Institute has partnered with the Rural Women's Movement in Africa and will be sending volunteers to work with women-based organizations in Africa who need additional staffing in December.



- Collaborative partnerships--organizations unite through resource sharing, joint advocacy, and idea development. Through shared experiences and goals, both US and abroad, we can better understand needs and develop solutions.
- Participatory research--students provide free research services to the Human Impacts Institute community. Through a partnership with Webster University in the Netherlands, students would have the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural experiences while working directly with professors on environmental research projects.
- Creative expression-- individuals foster creative thinking to reach people through cultural means, and highlight the creativity needed to develop policies that address environmental issues at a holistic level. Though these seem to be a diverse range of issues, they are all aimed at one theme: creating solutions to address environmental sustainability.

When I asked Tara about the best piece of advice she's received, she recalled an undergraduate advisor telling her that one day she'd have to choose one of her passions. "This was a great piece of advice that really made me think. I agree that we have to focus and choose to some degree, but I choose to be focused in the way I see the world; Everything links together in some way" said Tara.

As someone who can see things from a variety of perspectives, Tara explained that a key barrier to sustainability is that people have a hard time seeing how these issues impact their everyday lives. For example, "It doesn't hit home until you experience exasperated asthma. And sometimes, once it gets personal, it's easy for it to be someone else's fault; it's easy to point rather than looking inward and seeing how we contribute. At the same time, it is easy to turn a blind eye when we don't feel the impacts directly" said Tara.

The process of building the Human Impacts Institute has been both challenging but extremely rewarding at the same time. Some of the challenges that Tara has faced, similar to many entrepreneurs, has been to create an organization that is sustainable in the long term, and finding the right balance of developing a targeted yet flexible mission that encompasses the variety of endeavors that she has set out to accomplish. To Tara, the most rewarding component was realizing how much support she actually had. "It's been so gratifying to see the number of people who came out of the woodworks to support the organization's development" said Tara. Through Tara's efforts, its participants, partners, contributors and stakeholders, the Human Impacts Institute will hopefully build greater connections between people and the environment and build much-needed holistic, constructive and creative solutions.

For powerful PSA's by the Human Impacts Institute see:  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/HumanImpactsInst>