

## Carla Tennenbaum, Age 29 São Paulo, Brazil

In a society where consumption is such a determining part of people's lives, changing our consumption patterns is a crucial step toward creating an ethically and environmentally sustainable world. But we aren't only consumers — we're workers, artists, teachers, mothers, employers, friends and neighbors. In short, we're human beings. And as human beings, we need to re-evaluate not only the way we consume but the way we produce, the way we take and the way we give. In other words, we need to rethink the way we relate — to the planet, to other species and to each other.

The production system we have inherited from our fathers and forefathers — and that we recreate every day — is extremely harmful for the environment and for ourselves. We will be forced to change beyond what we can envision at the moment. This idea might cause some real anguish, but do we really feel comfortable in our lives? This system consistently fails to deliver the satisfaction that is supposed to be achieved through the consumption of goods, even for the most financially fortunate among us. I myself am in the 25 percent of humanity consuming above what is considered the minimum requirement level. Do I feel comfortable?

I was shocked when, 10 years ago, I began to realize the gigantic volume of non-recyclable waste generated by commercial and industrial activities in São Paulo. Since then, I have created technologies to turn this refuse into works of art, allowing low-income women to develop dignified ways to generate wages and express themselves creatively. While this is an important way to address the issue of human and material waste and transform people's attitudes toward how goods are made and sold, I am well aware that it is not enough.

Instead, it is one small step on the way to a more sustainable system of production where this kind of waste will not be generated in the first place.

Clearly, we are in the early stages of “conscious consumption.” For some people it is still about shopping for “greener” products from “greener” brands, but this awareness will continue to spread and intensify. A real cultural re-evolution must involve a deep reassessment of the way we spend not only our money but also our energy — how we live our lives, what we wake up for and how we shape the world around us.

I believe there are thousands of beautiful and viable ways to thrive on this planet. The principles of change need to be searched deeply and respectfully at the most sacred places we can find within ourselves and our communities so we can create a truly diverse, abundant and enjoyable reality.

While I do not know how long this process will take or what we will have to face along the way, it becomes ever more clear that change is both a necessity and a blessing. The sooner we accept this, the richer our options will be to produce something truly better for ourselves and our planet. **Y**



Carla Tennenbaum is a Brazilian artist living in São Paulo. For more information on EVAMARIA, the social enterprise she founded, visit [www.evamaria.org](http://www.evamaria.org).

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CARLA TENNENBAUM

## Xie Xiaoyun, Age 17 Beijing, China

My mother has always said that for every problem there is a solution. I think her sense of optimism has kept our family going through hard times. I grew up in a small village in Anhui province in Southeast China, and my parents worked in the field. But when I was five, we moved to Beijing hoping to find a better life. When we settled in the city, we learned that children from other places had to pay higher tuition than local students to attend regular school. My parents couldn't afford the fees, so I went to Qing Lian, a school for migrant workers' kids.

Discrimination against migrant workers is still a widespread problem in China, even though the government has taken many measures to solve it. The labor rights of migrant workers like my parents are not protected, and their kids have few opportunities to receive more education. So it's hard for migrant families to become citizens in these cities. Because of this discrimination, my parents had difficulties finding employment and took every small job they could find.


I thought poverty would never go away, no matter how hard I worked or studied. When my dad was hit by a truck coming home from work, my parents wanted to return to our hometown. But we decided to stay, firm in our belief of a better tomorrow. Dad recovered, but right before the 2008 Olympics, he lost his job again. Now my mother supports the family by preparing lunch boxes.

The best thing that has happened to me in Beijing is that I enrolled in the BN Vocational School (BNVS). It has become a family to me. I chose BNVS because my parents could not afford high school tuition and BNVS was free. To be honest, I was disappointed when I first saw the school. I asked myself: "How can this place—a plain three-story building with narrow hallways—be called a vocational school?" But soon I felt at home.

Vocational education wasn't as simple as I had imagined, and some skills were tricky to grasp. But here at BNVS, each student has a tutor to help us in our studies, listen to our stories and help solve our problems. All test scores are kept confidential as our teachers want us to focus on what we learn, not our grades.

As a school supported by charity, BNVS teaches every student to be grateful to those who help us and to know how to give back. I remember helping to raise money for victims of the Sichuan earthquake. I sold 60 newspapers with my partner, and it was my first time standing on the street and talking to strangers. My lesson from that day was to pass love forward, like the Olympic torch relay.

I feel thankful to have learned so many things that will benefit my future and am confident I will find my place in this city. At school, I have enrolled in the property and hotel service training and have been hired as an intern to do room service and cleaning at a local apartment building. By working hard every day, I can show my gratitude to the school and to society—and ease the financial burdens on my parents. I believe perseverance opens the door to opportunity and helps us face our difficulties while keeping our ideals. **Y**



*Xie sold newspapers to raise money for earthquake victims. She is one of 900 students in China benefiting from IYF's partnership with the Tiger Woods Foundation through scholarship support.*

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