



Seattle Professional Newsletter

April 2010

In This Issue

Member Spotlight: Shara Senior

Professional Development Opportunity: Pursuing Your Passion through Social Entrepreneurship on April 12

Networking Opportunity at Hotel Deca on April 23

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Member Spotlight: Shara Senior, Independent Consultant



Are you still wondering who your fellow Net Impact Seattle members are, what they do for a living and what plans they have for their careers? Read on and find out more about our featured member of the month, Shara Senior. After you've read about Shara, don't stop there. Send an email to niseattle@gmail.com and let us know that you want to share your story too.

What do you do and why did you join Net Impact?

For the last couple years, I've been an independent consultant for a few different organizations: Cascade Designs (an outdoor equipment manufacturer based in Seattle), PATH (a global health nonprofit), and Ascension Health (the largest Catholic hospital chain in the U.S.). My work has focused on helping organizations develop social enterprises that provide critical goods and services to the poor by involving them as producers, consumers, and entrepreneurs.

Right now I'm helping Cascade Designs explore the business viability of a new water filtration product that has the potential to empower entrepreneurs in developing countries to generate income and improve access to safe water to people in their community. Cascade Designs and PATH are working together to develop this product. Before I moved to Seattle, I worked for Ascension Health to launch a business incubator in Flint, MI focused on starting businesses that improve health. I also helped to develop and provide general management for the first two businesses that were incubated, which were run by low-income community members.

I've been a member of Net Impact for three years now, and I joined because I enjoy the company of like-minded professionals and students. I've also enjoyed attending the [conferences](#) and sitting in on some of the [Issues in Depth calls](#) about various topics. My favorite activity as a member of the Southeast Michigan Professional Chapter was the monthly book club – I'm hoping to bring that to the Seattle Professional Chapter as well. It was a great opportunity to read and discuss topics that are impacting the world.

What have you participated in changing that you are very excited about?

I became interested in international development at a young age because my dad worked for the nonprofit organization CARE when I was growing up. While I was an engineer at Nissan North America, I heard about the concept of microfinance and knew I wanted to better understand how business could be used to serve the poor. This led me to apply for my MBA. I obtained my MBA from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan in 2008. While at Ross I focused on understanding Base of the Pyramid (BoP) business models; that is, business models that involve the 4 billion people worldwide living on less than \$4 per day. I was able to do several projects that gave me experience with companies in low-income communities in India, Central America, and Jamaica.

I've been able to change mindsets and create an impact in various companies by sharing examples of how the poor can be engaged in supply chains. One example I like to share is about Jaipur Rugs, which I co-authored a chapter about for the 5th Anniversary Edition of C.K. Prahalad's book, "Fortunate at the Bottom of the Pyramid." Jaipur Rugs is the largest producer of hand knotted rugs in India. The company has 40,000 weavers and other contractors that it employs to produce rugs that are woven in remote villages in India. The company has inspired loyalty in its geographically dispersed workforce by promoting entrepreneurship and supporting the welfare of the weavers and their families. By integrating social impact into their business model, they are able to produce high quality products with low overhead costs. Being able to share lessons from companies like Jaipur Rugs, that are focused not only on profit, but also on the empowerment of their suppliers, creates change in people's assumptions about the capacity of the poor to be engaged in a global supply chain, especially as producers of luxury products.

What did you learn in the process that you would like to share?

One of the commonalities that I have observed among companies that have succeeded in sustainably integrating the poor into their business models is that they think of engaging the BoP as good corporate strategy, and not merely a nod to the "idea" of corporate social responsibility. For these companies, involving the BoP actually makes good business sense (for example, it may expose the company to a new market), and it isn't just a good exercise for public relations purposes.

What changes are you thinking you might want to spark in the future?

I want to continue to work with companies to launch new ventures, develop and commercialize new products, and create new customer markets that achieve positive social impacts. I can see myself doing this either within a large company or as a consultant.

Want to connect with Shara? Send her an email at sharanicolesenior@gmail.com

Professional Development

Dinner & Dialogue IV: Pursuing Your Passion through Social Entrepreneurship

Date: Monday, April 12

Time: 6:30 - 9:00pm

Location: Fabric of Life, 227 Westlake Ave N, Seattle, WA 98109

RSVP: <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/106726>

The fourth Dialogue in the Leading Change Series, "Pursuing Your Passion through Social Entrepreneurship," will explore how you can use the power of business to tackle some of the world's toughest social problems. Come meet Carol Schillios and hear her inspirational stories and experiences, as well as see a working example of using business to fund social programs. Through this event you will learn more about the field of social entrepreneurship and the power of cooperative micro-credit. You will be inspired and empowered to continue your journey of discovery and decide how you will leverage your skills and experience to use business to do good and do well.

About the Dialogue Leader

Carol Schillios is an expert with 34 years in the field of cooperative credit. She has a foundation, a fair trade boutique in Edmonds, and an NGO in West Africa. She is a true social entrepreneur and has dedicated her life to promoting cooperative partnerships in developing countries that improve people's access to affordable credit, education and health care. Her "Here Je" project in Bamako, Mali focuses on helping young women build self-esteem and independence, and facilitates learning the skills needed to be self-sustaining micro-entrepreneurs. So far she has taken 30 young women off the street, and successfully turned beggars and prostitutes into confident business owners in just 18 months!

A lively and engaging storyteller, Carol proudly says "my life is an open book," and she hopes to be an inspiration to others to follow their dreams. She is a firm believer that it only takes a single person making one small change to have a major effect on society and be the catalyst for major transformation. She speaks candidly about how her childhood shaped her character, the personal sacrifices that come along with following "a calling", her past life in the corporate world, and how pursuing her passions has been both "fulfilling and overwhelming." But when asked how she balances her life and why she does what she does, she replies with: "Because it's the right thing to do, and I can. I am still better off than 80% of the world's people." Through her powerful words, Carol prompts all of us to ponder the question: "If I died today, would I be satisfied with what I have accomplished in my life?"

Carol thinks of the world as her school, and the children she helps as her family, which has allowed her to continue pursuing her purpose in life. She has taken an innovative and holistic approach to international development, and believes in the power of combining business, along with policy, education and health, to solve some of the world's toughest social issues. Her journey of following her dreams is fascinating, and above all, she remains steadfast and courageous in her fight for what she believes in. She even spent 113 days in 2009 living on a roof in order to bring awareness to her causes and raise \$1 million!

Networking Opportunity

Networking Happy Hour at Hotel Deca

Date: Friday, April 23

Time: 5:30 - 7:30pm

Location: District Lounge (inside Hotel Deca in the University District), 4507 Brooklyn Ave NE

RSVP: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/NetImpactSeattle/162655396045>

Join us on Thursday, March 11th at the District Lounge for networking and happy hour! Meet other Seattle Net Impact members and mingle with Seattle's CSR community.

The event is free and open to members and non-members alike.

Connect



About Net Impact

Net Impact Seattle, a Professional Chapter affiliate of the international nonprofit [Net Impact](#), is a network

of professionals interested in advancing corporate social responsibility and sustainability. We empower our members to make meaningful change in and through the workplace. Join our effort to help businesses improve communities and the environment. For more information about Net Impact Seattle, visit [Net Impact Seattle's Facebook Page](#).

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