

climate tech

for a Sustainable Planet

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FOR TOMORROW



Voice of Gen Next...



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Arielle Kouyoumdjian is a podcaster, wilderness enthusiast, and climate justice activist. She is the producer of the podcast "Changing Planet Justice," which dives into environmental justice and social equity. She actively talks about climate change's impact on vulnerable communities. She has won various awards, including the "Best of SNO Journalism Award" and "The NYTimes 4th Annual Student Podcast award," among others. She is based in Virginia, USA.

WE NEED TO ADDRESS THE GROWING APATHY TOWARD CLIMATE CHANGE AMONG YOUNGER GENERATIONS.

You are the producer of the Changing Planet Justice podcast. Could you tell us what inspired you to start a podcast and what impact you wanted to make?

From second to eighth grade, I was always listening to something stimulating: Science Friday, BrainsOn, TEDx, Moth Radio Hour, Fresh Air, and a plethora of other podcasts. At age 12, I decided to combine my passions for podcasts, national parks, and environmental activism; I believed that even someone as young as I was could make a difference. Climate change terrified me, but I wanted to spread awareness without resorting to alarmism. My podcast evolved into an exploration of how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

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Today, I try to explore the intersections of climate change and social justice in a way that is both engaging and accessible to the public. I aim to amplify the voices of those on the front lines of the climate movement.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO DRIVE BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

You chose podcasting as the medium through which to spread awareness about climate change and drive behavioral change. What are some of the other approaches that interest you in terms of inducing a change in society?

I'm still searching for the most impactful ways to catalyze change. Sometimes, I wonder why the raw facts of climate change aren't sufficient on their own to scare those in power into overhauling social, political, and economic systems. Civil disobedience can be an effective way to drive widespread change but, beyond protests, we need positive action that everyone can get behind. I think that financial incentives would encourage adults to commit to behavioral change: taxing and/or capping carbon emissions; cutting financial support for fossil fuels; and subsidizing sustainable energies would all make a big difference.

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Additionally, we need to address the growing apathy toward climate change among younger generations; when it seems like the climate is changing but government, politics, and society fail to respond, young people begin to grow hopeless and passive.

Telling my story, voicing my fears, and amplifying the voices of those who have more power than me are what I feel I can do to take the future of this Earth into my own hands and make a difference.

Which is more important to achieving sustainability: a shift in consumer behavior or disruptive innovation to create solutions/products that are sustainable by design?

Consumer change is key to becoming a more sustainable community. While novel, “greener” products are eye-catching and garner abundant media attention, they are often inaccessible to a large section of the general public. Instant gratification is at the core of much of today's consumption issues; if consumers and capitalists can curb their desire to develop, produce, consume, receive, and travel as fast as possible, we can massively cut the carbon emissions that are the corollary of prioritizing efficiency at all costs. Rather, consumers and producers need to make the most of the assets we already have, funneling technology and other reusables into circular economies, drawing on renewable resources, and recycling.

WHY THE WEALTHIEST NATIONS HAVE THE GREATEST OBLIGATIONS

What sort of support do you expect from society in terms of protecting the environment?

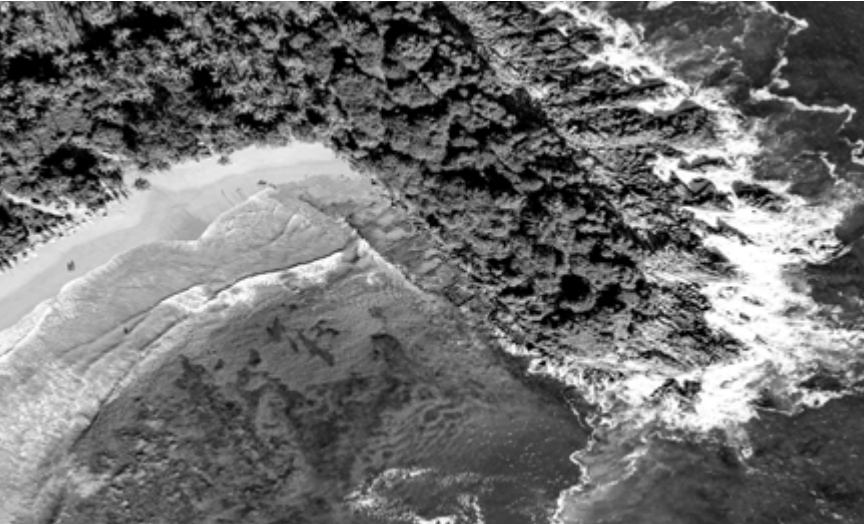
Everyone can contribute to collective change. I believe that, as individuals, our only responsibility is to do the best that we can with the resources we have.

The wealthiest nations have the greatest obligation to make sustainable investments, not only because they are historically responsible for climate change, but because they are the least vulnerable to its effects. Developing countries that contribute negligibly to climate change should receive the full support of developed countries as they grapple with its most devastating impacts. As a young person, I wish that adults would invest in sustainable initiatives, rather than continuing to fund the fossil-fuel industry. It seems that older generations prioritize the short-term benefits and rapid rewards of fossil fuels over the long-term social and environmental rewards of renewable energy. I'd have a lot more faith in society if I knew that it valued the survival of future generations over momentary prosperity. I believe a larger portion of taxpayers' money should be allocated to achieving sustainability goals.



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HOW LARGE ORGANIZATIONS CAN WORK WITH YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

How can large organizations collaborate with younger environmental activists such as yourself to achieve these goals?

Providing youth activists with a podium, amplifying our voices, and empowering us to speak up keeps the climate movement in motion. In a corporate-controlled society, kids' inability to contribute financially, pay taxes, or vote renders us socially powerless – or at least, it often feels that way. When large organizations allow us to participate in their initiatives, it gives us some sense of agency in a society that sometimes makes us feel overlooked and even trampled. At times, the sense of social inertia becomes so pervasive that it feels like young people and adults are each waiting for the other to save the world.

Large organizations can gain the trust of young people by inviting, encouraging, and motivating them to work alongside adults. Then, instead of feeling helpless and restricted by our youth, we feel both acknowledged and appreciated. By combining the business and technical knowledge of the adult generation with the fresh perspectives and idealism of youth, we are far better equipped as a society to combat our common Earth-destroying enemy.

You have won various environmental impact awards. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years, I hope to be a broadcast journalist on public radio, covering climate justice. I understand the transformative impact that green spaces can have on children growing up; to be able to run, play, picnic, and relax in a public park is a privilege I took for granted but, now, I value it more than ever.

If you could have one superpower to change the way things are today, which would you choose?

I've always said my superpower would be persuasion: rhetoric so powerful that it could unequivocally convince anyone who listened. Climate change, and the impending devastation of our planet, constantly weigh on me. I want to convince everyone, young and old, that change is possible. This requires us to build momentum, show



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dedication, and endure discomfort, but change is possible and within reach. We may have reached the "point of no return," but there is no point at which we cannot begin.

What is the one piece of advice that you would like to give to your peers?

Stay hopeful, but not too hopeful. Stay frightened, but not paralyzed. Passivity is the worst crime. Your voice is more powerful than you think it is, and our voices are most powerful when we speak up together. I want my peers to assert themselves when they see an opportunity to promote and drive sustainability. Contrary to what we've been taught, sometimes we need to push back against adults: email the head of school about your idea for implementing solar energy in school buildings; teach your dad about reducing food waste as he prepares a meal; show your grandmother how to recycle; talk about politics and environmental issues at the dinner table. Climate change is a global crisis, which also means it's a global fight that, like it or not, we're in together. So, no matter where you are in the world, how old you are, or how loud or quiet your voice is, speak up, push back, and keep going.

