

Shyness: A Cure in a Penguin Suit

Reader's Digest

readersdigest.ca

Most Read
Most Trusted

THE HAPPINESS INDEX

Canada's richest
city measures
quality of life

p. 66

PET CONTEST
SEND IN YOUR
PHOTOS
AND WIN!

p. 15

GUNS

p. 88

- The World's
Deadliest
Weapon
- Toronto
Under
Fire

Canadian
Jennifer Corriero
nurtles volunteers
to good causes
online
p. 38

Matchmaker to the World



August
2009



Networking for Global Change

BY SUSAN MCCLELLAND

**The TakingIT
Global
website
brings young
people
together
to create a
better world**

Three years ago, Jennifer Corriero visited a tin shack in Nairobi that serves as an orphanage for 40 children, some of them cast off as pariahs because their parents died of AIDS. Showing her around was Evans Ochieng, then 25, a Kenyan who volunteered there once a week as a teacher.

While touring the small room where the children slept, ate, played and took their lessons, "my life changed," says



 **Influential
Canadian**

Corriero, now 29. "I realized that this is why I do what I do—offer Evans and others the support, connections and guidance they need."

For Corriero, who founded the Toronto-based youth website named TakingITGlobal (TIG), meeting the orphans gave her tangible evidence that the hundreds of hours she had spent in front of a computer screen were well worth it. The website had helped Ochieng put into practice—both in his career and as a volunteer—the community development and computer-technology training he got at a Nairobi youth centre. "I learned how young people were volunteering in Canada and also creating their own businesses," he says. "Most importantly, I found other young people in Kenya trying to bring about change."

Specifically, Ochieng used information from TIG to help him open a business that takes tourists to community projects run by other young people.

visit the site, posting blogs, taking part in discussion groups, rallying behind causes and supporting one another on projects ranging from food drives to environmental cleanups.

TakingITGlobal also offers background on such issues as global warming and human rights, and provides links to help members find conferences and write project proposals and funding letters. Last year, more than four million young people used the site; members started or joined projects at the local, national and international levels more than 54,000 times.


Corriero grew up in the suburbs north of Toronto in a comfortable middle-class home, but learned early that some people face bigger hurdles than others. While her family is successful today—her paternal grandfather, who recently passed away, was recognized for his volunteer work

Nearly 250,000 young people permanent TIG members, rallying important local and global projects.

He is also advocating for children's rights and better child-development programs in Kenya. "I love children," says Ochieng. "I thought if people saw that I cared about these children, they would care, too."

Today, nearly 250,000 young people in 261 countries are permanent TIG website members. Many more

with seniors, and Rocky Lofranco, her uncle, is one of Toronto's top personal-injury lawyers—her grandparents struggled when they arrived in Canada from Italy in the 1940s. Her mother, Mary-Jo, had to leave university before graduating, to work in the family business, Tony's Pizzeria. So she and Jennifer's father, Nick, pushed Jennifer



and her two siblings, Nicole, 25, and Joseph, 23, to take every opportunity to follow their own dreams.

As a child, Corriero had eclectic interests. She excelled in tennis and figure skating, and loved art; even now, the walls of TIG's downtown Toronto office are filled with her acrylic paintings. It was a Grade 7 teacher, however, who first identified Corriero as a leader, asking her to direct the St. Joseph School play that year.

In high school, where she needed to put in 40 hours of volunteering to graduate, she became active in her community. Typical for someone whose TIG online nickname is Jen-ergy, she chose to give her time to three places: The Kortright Centre, an environmental-education program; the McMichael Canadian Art Collection; and a food bank.

"It was eye-opening," she says. "Here I was in the middle of the arts, poverty and the environment. I

in 261 countries are behind causes and supporting

learned a lot about issues in my own backyard."

Corriero was surprised, though, that so few young people were involved in these organizations. She tried to change that by initiating a food drive at her school to raise awareness about the poor in her community, and organizing a youth art exhibit at the McMichael gallery.

At age 17, Corriero attended a sum-

mer program at York University that involved hiring young people to work on web design and development projects. It was there that Corriero met her future TIG partner, Michael Furdyk, who shared her passion for using the Internet to engage and empower young people.

In 1999, while pursuing her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, Corriero and Furdyk went to a conference in Ottawa. Rollerblading along the Rideau Canal during a break, they discussed what they would do if they had the resources to do anything they chose.

Corriero pondered the question. "I have been fortunate to be surrounded by teachers and family who saw potential in me," she told Furdyk that day. "They spotted talents I never knew I had. Those moments when I was noticed launched me into thinking of others. How unfair it is that there are children who are not supported and encouraged to make a difference with their talents. Imagine a world where every young person saw himself or herself as a role model. How would that change the world?"

So the pair made a pact to create a website where youth could inspire one another. They tapped some of the business contacts they had made through conferences and other activities, approaching a few Toronto-based companies for start-up funds. They also approached Microsoft for funding, and ended up being hired as consultants to help the giant computer-software manufacturer better

understand how young people utilize the Internet. "Jennifer has a passion for how the Internet is being used by youth today to help them come together and find new ways to get involved in the political process," says Akhtar Badshah, Microsoft's senior director for global community affairs. "Her insight is invaluable."

Membership grew swiftly once the site was up, with young people encouraging their peers to join. Youth in developing nations where freedom of expression is curtailed discovered the site as a place to express their opinions and share their stories.

In Baghdad, Mohammed Jaafar Saeed found TIG in 2003 after satellite receivers were allowed into Iraq. "It was reassuring to see such a large number of young global-minded people who care about the world," says Saeed, 24. He became a TIG member, translating some of the content into Arabic in the hope that other young Iraqis would get involved.

"In Iraq, there is domestic abuse, gender discrimination and child abuse, and human rights are not respected, but nobody talks about these issues," says Saeed. "On TIG discussion boards, we would often discuss controversial issues like politics, and there were several members with whom I would disagree. Over time, we became friends."

Toronto businessman Don Tapscott, author of *Growing Up Digital*, has mentored Corriero for several years and watched TIG grow in inter-

national influence. "A lot has been said in the West that this generation of young people is lazy and spoiled," he says. "But that's not the case. This is a generation that is about diversity, social justice, egalitarianism and entrepreneurship. They're not antigovernment; they just don't like the governments they have, and justly so.

They're finding a place for themselves to bring about the change they want to see."

Corriero, who has already earned a slew of awards, including the World Economic Forum's Global Leader of Tomorrow, agrees: "Young people want a better world order," she says. "This is what unites us."

SORRY, IT'S CLASSIFIED



Browsing through the classified ads in my local newspaper, I stumbled on this once-in-a-lifetime offer: "Lawn mower—tends to catch on fire but easily put out with garden hose."
Kristen Brown

I was looking for bedroom furniture when this ad caught my eye: "Four-poster bed, 101 years old. Perfect for antique lover."
Máirechal Cohen

Whoa, someone must have had cold feet. An ad posted on craigslist stated: "Will trade brand-new (never been worn) wedding and engagement ring set for handgun."
Elizabeth Darnall

NERVE ENDINGS

As an elementary-school teacher, I have conferences with parents about their children.

At one meeting, a mother asked, "Is there some way that the teachers can have my son do his homework at school? He doesn't like to do it at home."
Kirk Beckendorf

When I was working as a clerk at a sporting-goods store, a woman came up to my register with a package of white athletic socks. "Will you open this up so I can see how the socks feel?" she asked.

Reluctantly I tore open the package, and she scrutinized the merchandise. She handed me the package saying, "I'll take them."

Relieved, I started to ring her up, until she interrupted me: "Can I have another pack? This one's been opened."
Daniel Nigro