

The story of Liberty Science Center is of an institution aspiring to make its maximum contribution to a better world. Our journey has had its share of challenging moments and inspiring exhilarations, but above all it is a story of a mission-driven institution that relentlessly does its best to be both efficient and effective, or in the words of Peter Drucker and Stephen Covey, “to do things right and to do the right things.”

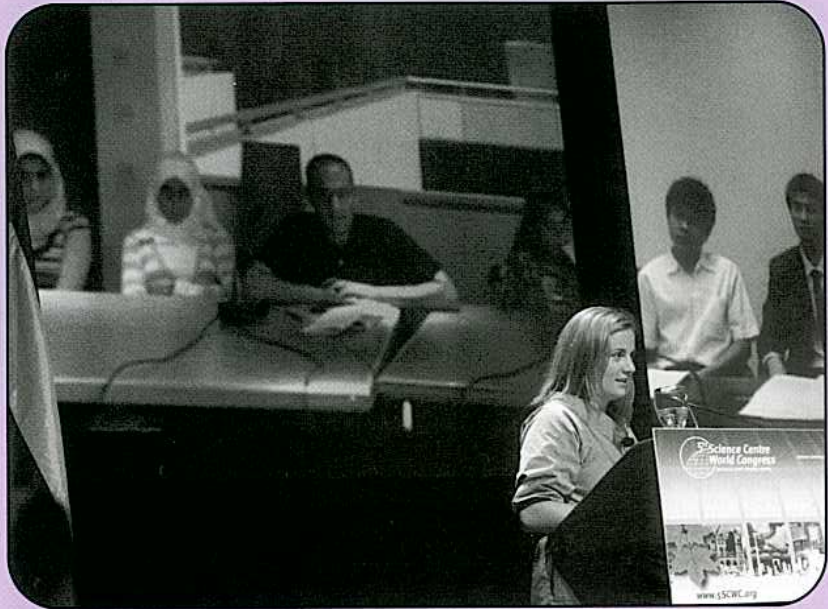
What ensued from the awful morning on September 11, 2001, across the Hudson River became a clarifying episode for the soul of our institution. With trauma psychologists reporting on our institution as a proactive sanctuary, and with our attendance slowly recovering, the executive team and Board of Trustees nonetheless embraced a bold long view and committed to a transformation to become a larger, refreshed resource with a heightened sense of relevancy. During its reopening year, 325,000 students have acquired new insights at Liberty Science Center. Plus, more than 400,000 family members have discovered the engaging value of our exhibition, theater, and program experiences, with growing numbers deciding to join our Insiders Club and become members.

Net promoter scores—regarded as one of the most rigorous indexes of consumer satisfaction—are tracking very high at the new Liberty Science Center. Informed by this and many other measures, we know that we must continually strive for the optimum balance of value-enhancing, brand-building steps that grow the institution’s popularity *and* usefulness. Indeed, searching for the best nexus of relevancy and resources continues as the core quest of our institution. ■

*Emlyn Koster has been a science museum CEO for the past 22 years, at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, Drumheller, Alberta, Canada (1986–91); the Ontario Science Centre, Toronto (1991–96); and Liberty Science Center, Jersey City, New Jersey (since 1996).*

## Building the Future: Science Centers and the Net Generation

By Jennifer Corriero



During her keynote address at the Fifth Science Centre World Congress in Toronto in June, Jennifer Corriero was joined by youth leaders in Argentina, China, and Egypt via webcast. Photo courtesy the Fifth Science Centre World Congress

If young people were actively engaged in all aspects of society and thought of themselves as community leaders, problem solvers, and mentors, how would the world change? Science centers can be part of the answer.

By reaching out to the net generation, sometimes known as N-Geners, science centers may not only expand their audience and influence, but also initiate action on global issues. The net generation is *influential* in part because of its sheer numbers. Half of the world’s population is under 25. In developing countries, youth make up 70 percent of each nation’s population on average. This generation is also very *connected*. They are excited by technology, and many use cell phones or the Internet daily. N-Geners are *diverse* and increasingly exposed to global culture. Most are familiar with food,

music, and sports teams from other countries. These young people as a whole are *enabled*. Because the Internet gives them quick access to information, they demand a greater level of participation in decision-making. Finally, the net generation is *aware* and concerned about social responsibility and the environment.

### Online connections

In TakingITGlobal (TIG), the organization I cofounded in 2000, we use technology to strengthen youth leadership capacity, foster cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, and increase awareness and involvement in global issues. Our web site ([www.TakingITGlobal.org](http://www.TakingITGlobal.org)) has more than 200,000 members in 200 countries. The site connects youth to peers, edu-

cators, and nongovernmental organizations. It provides them with support and information, and inspires them to use the Internet to enact real change in their communities and the world.

TIG's work has led to online and on-the-ground programs that address social issues including climate change, HIV/AIDS, the digital divide, and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals ([www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)). TIG works on projects including Youth Voices, which invites young artists to respond to global warming and cultural conflict; Creating Local Connections West Africa, which provides leadership and entrepreneurship training to youth; and Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS, which empowers young people to address AIDS in their communities.

## Casting the net

Like TIG, science centers can connect to the net generation, providing information, inspiring action, and encouraging young people to develop to their fullest potential. Through the Internet, science centers can reach beyond their walls, partnering with community organizations, schools, and other science centers nearby and around the world.

Science centers can also work to alter their thinking about power structures. The Internet has shifted power dynamics away from the traditional hierarchical structure; leadership is now based on collaborative networks. In the

past, young people were seen as passive students, employees, citizens, and consumers. Now, N-Geners expect that as students, they will fill roles as mentors and facilitators; as employees, they will provide creativity and entrepreneurial spirit; as citizens, they will be community leaders and active volunteers; and as consumers, they will design content and interactive experiences. Taking this one step further means that today's young people can be global leaders, problem solvers, innovators, and information society leaders.

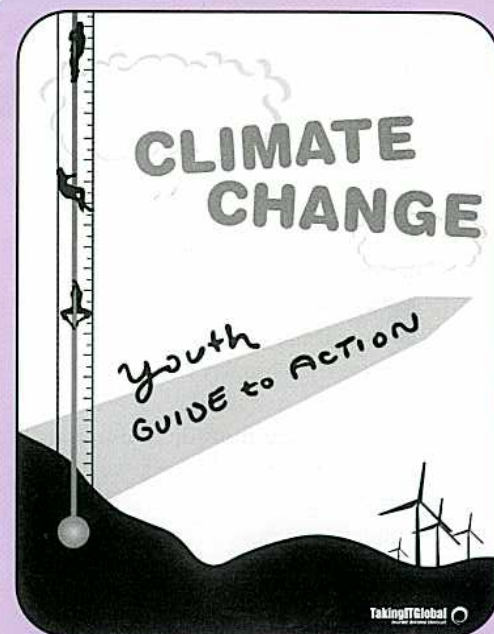
Youth today already have a meaningful impact on their communities. They share their ideas at conferences and public forums. They organize petitions and peaceful protests. They are volunteers and fund-raisers for charities. By encouraging grassroots programs, science centers can give young people leadership roles and the opportunity to contribute even more actively.

In addition, science centers can foster experiential projects that capture young people's attention. As learners, today's youth are multitaskers who thrive on active, discovery-based learning. Young people express themselves through visual, dramatic, and musical arts. They produce their own media through newsletters, web sites, and radio stations. In addition, they are entrepreneurs, creating businesses and jobs.

Finally, science centers can engage youth in engaging youth. Centers can connect to peer-to-peer global networks and promote cross-cultural understanding.

N-Geners view their community in a global context and are ready to engage with peers as never before.

Through social networks like Facebook and MySpace, they are moving beyond the clique model, which focuses on conformity, rules, and exclusion,



TakingITGlobal provides youth with action guides, such as this one on global warming, to help them address social issues locally and globally. Image courtesy TakingITGlobal

into a social network model, which is flexible, porous, and inclusive.

Young people are influential, they are active, and they have access to unprecedented information and resources via the Internet. As children and youth become more involved in technology, the role of science centers as platforms for learning and problem solving becomes even more important.

One of the greatest challenges is ensuring that resources reach young people in all parts of the globe, not just in the big cities. This can be achieved by designing inviting and interactive spaces, both online and in-person, where people can cocreate learning experiences to improve communities. Science centers can play an important role in connecting young people and inspiring action around the world. ■

*Jennifer Corriero is cofounder and executive director of TakingITGlobal. She is an alumna of the Ontario Science Centre Science School, Toronto, and she obtained her Masters in Environmental Studies at York University. This article is adapted from her keynote address at the Fifth Science Centre World Congress.*



TakingITGlobal's web site inspires, informs, and connects more than 200,000 young activists in 200 countries. Image courtesy TakingITGlobal