

She takes IT global



Jennifer Correiro, 27
Co-Founder &
Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

“My philosophy in life is to live, to learn, to laugh and to love.”



Jennifer Correiro is a 27 year old Canadian that started a worldwide wave with a social idea and the use of technology. TakingITGlobal is now a phenomenon - connecting people and providing platforms for social enterprises. Just how an idea that first struck her when she was 19, now evolves into an online thrust that benefits millions of people around the world? THE ASPIRANT spent a heart-to-heart moment with her when she was in Singapore as an international guest speaker at the Social Innovators' Forum 2007.

Energetic, charismatic and bubbly Jennifer captured the attention of the audience at the DBS Auditorium and awed them with her witty replies. She accepted THE ASPIRANT's offer of an interview during session break and started spilling the beans, "November 1999 was when it all started. It was a time that many referred to as the 'Internet Bubble', an era that launched thousands of web-based businesses and made many millionaires. It was also an era where novel ideas were tested and new initiatives welcomed. It was at that opportune time that I conceived an inspirational model of combining technology with the desire of young leaders to do good. There wasn't something like that around so I thought it would be good if I started it. I was pleasantly surprised to find how such an idea that stemmed from a humble campus beginning became the most recognised online brand in social innovation."

She advocated the theme of inclusion and the culture of peer-support, all using technology to break geographical and socio-political barriers. Today, that idea grew to a social enterprise that now reaches millions in at least 12 languages. TakingITGlobal now speaks key world languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Russian and French. But just how could an idea like TakingITGlobal able to receive worldwide attention, support and following?

"I think when I first started the concept of youth online network and using that to get the 'have' to help the 'have-not', the world was looking for an initiator to get that off the ground. I was merely an agent of change that started the ball rolling at the right time. It has been 8 years since I co-founded TakingITGlobal and now we connect and support over 172,000 members across 200 countries." said Jennifer who earned a place in 'Shapers of Our Future' by Converge magazine for her contributions in the areas of technology and education.

Now, Jennifer travels the world to give speeches and conduct workshops on

social entrepreneurship. Her tour of presentations included the World Urban Forum, International Aids Conference, World Summit on Sustainable Development and the UNESCO Youth Forum in Paris. For her dedication and leadership, she was selected by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader (2005) and Global Leader for Tomorrow (2002).

She has every reason to be feeling upbeat about the unlimited potential in social entrepreneurship. After all, there are more than 3 billion low income consumers and that presents a market worth of US\$5 trillion dollars. "There is a huge potential out there and it is a beautiful thing to be in the business of changing lives. It is both noble and rewarding, financially and spiritually. Even in places that high technology cannot reach, we are still able to find ways to help using low technology such as radio."

Indeed, social entrepreneurship is big business in the West. But in Singapore, the social enterprise sector suffers from a generally poor entrepreneurial environment and a culture of letting the Government take the lead. It is against this backdrop that Social Innovators Park was formed as a not-for-profit organisation that aims to develop a self-reliant and thriving model for social entrepreneurs to bring positive transformation to society.

Jennifer's observational skill was put to a test when she was asked to identify what issues Singaporeans faced in promoting social enterprises. Jennifer gave her take, "I think there is much prosperity in Singapore, compared to the other

countries in Southeast Asia. There is enough wealth to potentially blind many from choosing social entrepreneurship as a path. Hopefully this will not lead to apathy. Even if there is a lack of those who can be helped locally, Singaporeans can embark on social enterprises in the region. Asia is such a huge market, the right formula in helping people in need can also be extremely rewarding, financially and spiritually."

Moving forward, Jennifer expressed optimism that TakingITGlobal.org will scale up to reach a million users by 2009. "Our focus this year is to grow our network. The more we are able to reach, the more hope there are that assistance can reach the masses that are found at the base of the pyramid. Technology will keep changing and we will keep innovating. That is one way in which we can multiply our users and beneficiaries. Ultimately, we want participatory learning and community development to come almost naturally to young people who are in the position to help others awhile helping themselves."

She is on track. TakingITGlobal is a partner to no less than five UN agencies and is supported by several corporations and philanthropic foundations. Her determination is echoed by her parting shot - "The power of thoughts can change mindsets" and with that it is hoped that her trail of success can inspire others around the world to use their talents and mix it with a viable business idea so as to effect a positive change in the world we live in.

