



TakingITGlobal

INSPIRE INFORM INVOLVE

TakingITGlobal.org is an online community that connects youth in their local and global communities. It is now the world's most popular online community for young people interested in making a difference, with thousands of unique visitors each month.

Creating Local Connections (CLC) Canada is an integrated three-year program (2006-2009) of TakingITGlobal with a goal of inspiring, informing, and involving youth as engaged participants in Canadian communities through: awareness and access, collaboration and communication, and capacity building initiatives.

The CLC Canada program operates with a part-time coordinator for each province or territory. In Newfoundland and Labrador, 21-year-old **Chad Griffiths** is the provincial coordinator for TakingITGlobal under the CLC Canada program. Catch a Wave speaks with Chad about his role and goals:

CAW: How would you describe TakingITGlobal.org?

Chad: TakingITGlobal.org (or TIG, for short) is an amazing online community and over 130,000 youth engage on it right now. They get on there and have discussions, share art, poetry and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that youth face, share, and have in common all around the world. Youth from Canada to Bangladesh can engage in dialogue and share ideas on a global scale.

CAW: The issues that participants can talk about are the ones that they care about, isn't it? It's all user-generated content right?

Chad: For the amount of young people in the world, it's surprising how similar their challenges are. We thought it was wise and really beneficial to have an area, a virtual location online, for people to have discussions about how to take on these challenges.

It can be anything from discussing ways to organize your community to address safe drinking water or the environment, to more inspirational things like sharing photography, paintings, and poetry.

It's a three-tiered project with the goals to inspire, involve and inform.

Youth, traditionally and even to this day, are made to feel a little marginal. They have to wait in line to get some respect, some credibility. I think TIG helps youth take a lead in elevating their voice to the table - the global table, if you will.

It is this world that they're inheriting, and a lot of their voices are being shut out, especially for those who don't have access to modern communication technologies. I think for people in Africa, Southeast Asia, even in rural Newfoundland, TIG kind of gives youth an even playing ground.

TIG gives you access to all these tools to help you get organized in your community - from conference software to project guidelines. And perhaps most valuable, there's people talking about what they did that worked for them, what didn't, or offering their help.

CAW: Tell me about your role in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chad: Something I think a lot of TIG users don't know is that it's based out of Toronto, Canada.

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www.takingITglobal.org

It's a place where youth from across the world can meet, share information, and work together to make their communities, schools, countries, and world, a better place.

Though TakingITGlobal.org, Newfoundland and Labrador youth can share discussions, art, perspectives, and experiences with others from across the global or in their own towns.

Thoughts and ideas that revolve around a single idea – how can youth change this world for the better?

On issues like poverty and employment, the environment, education – issues that effect youth everywhere – TIG members inform, inspire, and involve each other, to effect change.

Catch a Wave!

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The goal of my project, **Creating Local Connections Canada**, is an ambitious one: to map out and engage every youth organization in Canada through TIG and to create a pan-Canadian network of youth.

It's an online portal to essentially everything that can be accessed by anyone who's interested in an issue. Some people just go on there and practice their language skills.

Every country in the world has their own TIG-portal. It helps sort out the local and the global. Whether you're from Pakistan or Japan or wherever, you can access the relevant organizations, pieces of art, or any content that is specific to your region.

It's really easy to "act locally, think globally" through TIG. Canada is, of course, a particular interest for us because of our sprawling country that could be aided by this technology. We're in a great position in Canada to effect real change in the rest of the world.

CAW: *Will TIG help youth to be more effective in affecting change in the world?*

Chad: It's really broad. For example, at a school in Clarendville we were talking about poverty and people were just astonished that half the world is on three dollars a day. They thought that maybe some countries in Africa had starving people.

That kind of information never got into their curriculum. They're in grades 11/12, and there's half the world they didn't know about.

I guess the term is "raising capacity," but all that means is getting people talking, getting them in the same room, finding out common goals and helping people use certain tools that TIG has.

Creating Local Connections Canada really is a great project. It's not just a promotional blitz, it really is raising capacity for youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm so happy to be introducing TIG, especially into rural areas. Some places around Newfoundland and Labrador are isolated but at the same time really connected and it really allows for that.

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Before I knew it, I was being struck left, right, and centre, with opportunity after opportunity that I was able to take advantage of because of my involvement with the Youth Council: I was elected the Western Representative on the Board of Directors for **FINALY!**; I was appointed to the Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Advisory Committee by the Minister of Human Resources, Labour, and Employment; sure, I even won a Youth Ventures Entrepreneur of the Year Award!

All of these things came my way because of my involvement with a Youth Council. The same can happen to you too.

If you choose to become involved, whether with a Youth Council or another group, I feel confident saying that you will not regret it. If you come in with an open mind and the approach that you will see a change in the future of our province then you will not be disappointed.

Above all, just realize: you all have the ability, to a much higher degree than you may ever realize, to dictate what your future and the future of those around you will look like.

In addition to all this other stuff, there's really great stuff on TIG in terms of financial opportunities. For example, people in rural Labrador might say "Well that's all good and fine, but I can't really get connected – I can't afford to go to conferences in big cities like Montreal or Toronto."

Well now there's an entire section on TIG financial opportunities and maybe there are ways to get to these opportunities in other provinces. There are people and organizations giving away money essentially to enhance the role of youth, especially when it comes to isolated or marginalized populations.

CAW: *What do you mean by isolated or marginalized populations?*

Chad: In addition to a part-time 15 hours a week provincial and territorial coordinator, Creating Local Connections Canada has a full-time Francophone engagement coordinator and an Aboriginal engagement coordinator because they are Canadian populations who have been marginalized in the civic voice of Canadian affairs. So, if you add youth onto that marginalization, you do get into a real critical area of improvement.

Youth are in the best position to effect change. They're the most adept at using new technologies and are the most effective communicators - and they have all the motive in the world because this is the world that they're inheriting.

CAW: *If I wanted to get involved with TIG, what would be the first step that you would recommend for me?*

Chad: Go on TIG and make a profile. It's free, it's fun, it's just like MySpace. You can say all the places you've visited and the books you like, you can post pictures. It's a really fun and friendly place to connect to others. There are discussion forums, and internal messaging - it really is an experience.

I'm hoping that eventually people will be doing exactly what I'm doing – using TIG as their vehicle to get out and reach even more people – and for TIG to really inspire people to understand what powers they have. ■

Do not take that lightly. For, one day, you will have to look back at your life and what you've done to contribute to your own personal growth and to the growth and benefit of those around you.

Whether what you see fills you with joy and fulfillment or sadness and regret is up to you. Just do something!

Now, as for me, I'm pursuing the dreams that have been laid in my heart by someone much greater than myself. It's an amazing thing.

I've been so blessed, with a very hefty scholarship (much due to my work with the Youth Council) and with a reliable network of people all across the country.

I look forward to continuing to impact the world so that it may become, in some way, a little bit better than when I entered it. I hope you do the same.

-Brook Biggin

P.S. I would do it all over again, twice. ■