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S O C I A L M E D I A S P O T L I G H T : E D M O V O L U N T E E R I N G

Edmonton-based GozAround a social network for volunteering

by Linda Hoang

Ben Block likes to help people. He's volunteered for different organizations over the years, including doing big volunteer jobs like an overseas Habitat for Humanity build in Kyrgyzstan. But mostly he likes those small acts that make a big impact.

"In my life, I can think back to instances of just helping someone out that is just really small but makes you feel surprisingly good," Block (@benjaminblock) says.

"All of us have a unique set of skills and abilities and resources and time and whatever that to us is probably not that big a deal to share with somebody but to someone who doesn't have that, it's huge. For the helper, you have a huge emotional pay off and for the person getting the help, it could be life-altering."

Connecting those who need help and those who want to help, is the purpose of **GozAround**, a new social network founded by Block.



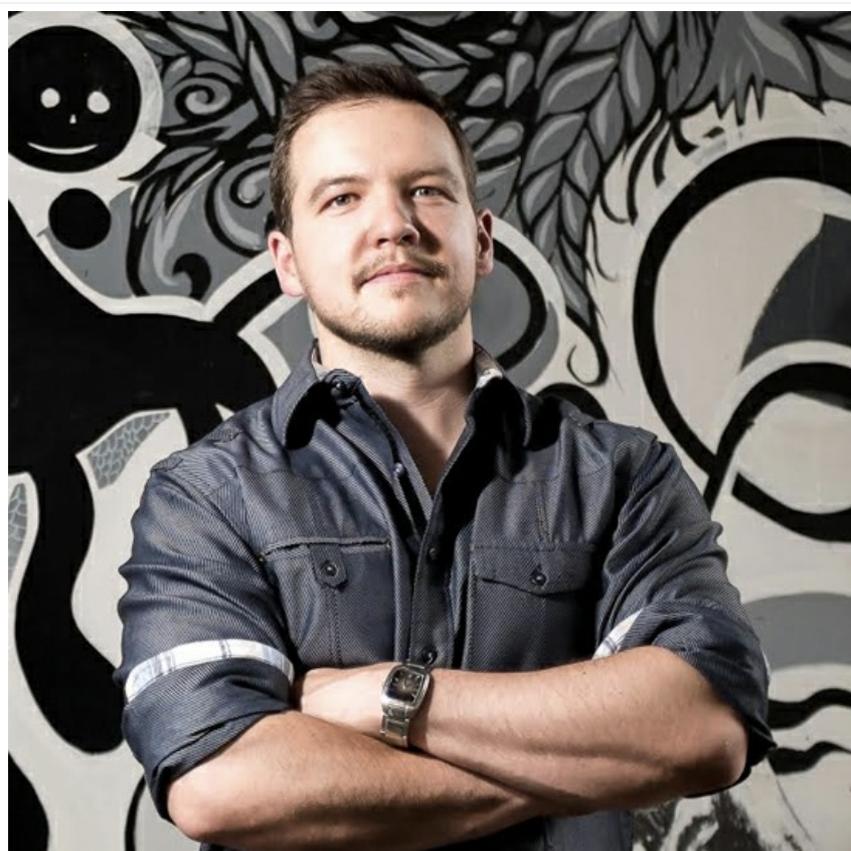
It's kind of like crowd sourcing for favours.

On GozAround, you have your more formal, traditional volunteer opportunities, posted by non-profit community groups, but you also have smaller, one-to-one requests for help.

“If you need help moving a couch on the weekend, or maybe you broke your foot and need someone to take your dog for a walk, that sort of thing,” Block says.

“Basically we’re just trying to make it quicker and easier for people to get involved in the community.”

Block, a 34-year-old lawyer born and raised in Edmonton, has been working on GozAround for about a year. The site officially launched in late August and about a month ago Block took a leave of absence from the law firm he’s been working with, to focus efforts on growing GozAround.



Edmontonian Ben Block is the founder of GozAround

Although as it hasn’t caught on as quickly as he’d hoped, the new network is growing.

“Every day there’s new members and new organizations coming on,” Block says. “More formal volunteer opportunities are starting to pop up and also more people coming on with those individual requests.”

In the last few weeks, Block’s seen users help a woman throw her daughter a birthday party, help with a Thanksgiving meal, and answered a call to help rake up leaves for a senior. The Salvation Army recently signed on and is seeking volunteers for their annual kettle campaign.

“It’s starting to take life.”

The volunteer opportunities vary in topics – as well as in location. Although the platform is Edmonton-based, there are users posting from across Canada and in the U.S.

There’s this idea of paying it forward – and karma – built into the site (what ‘gozaround’ comes around), and there’s also a gamification aspect too. The more you engage by volunteering, the more points you gain. The points can be redeemed for rewards. Non-profit organizations who use the site can also buy more points to give to their volunteers as a thank you – think of them as the modern-day volunteer T-shirts or gift cards.