



SMALL ACTIONS

# BIG IMPACT

The uprise and uproar  
of microvolunteering

EMILY KENNEDY

Photo Credit: Timothy Muza

“It was little things, small things, that didn’t require more than a Saturday afternoon.”

I’m on my way home from yoga, it’s been a busy day of the usual: work, meetings, last-minute grocery shopping, squeezing in some exercise. Next, I’ve got dinner and housework on my mind. But as I listen to Amanda Needham interviewed on CBC radio on my drive home this busy weekday evening, her words seem to cut through the chaos.

“That’s what matters, that’s the way to actually change and respond to the

cacophony around us. It’s not by being louder, it’s by being tiny and real.”

She’s describing the small acts of kindness she received after her bike was stolen from her Brooklyn home, and after she posted a larger-than-life sign wishing the thief well. She posted the 8-by-3-foot cardboard sign outside her home, and online. People who saw it turned up at her door to offer other bikes, to ask how they could help, to share a laugh, and to just give her a hug.

One day, a salt-and-pepper-haired man rang the bell. He was an art dealer, and he and a British peer wanted to put her

sign up for auction. The art dealer bought the sign for the price of her old bike.

As Needham wrote on her blog (later published in the Washington Post), these micro actions, paired with technology, had “gone global.”

Her story is an example of microvolunteering. Microvolunteering can take many forms, but generally these actions are characterized by only taking a few minutes, involving little to no long-term commitment, and can often be done from home, or wherever you are in the world.

For example, The Falling Fruit project is a website where users can pin to a map



Photo credit: Joanne Steventon



Photo Credit: Derek Hille

**PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**

Craig Kielburger at WE Day celebrations in Ottawa.

Larry Rousseau (left), vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress with Youth Role Model of the Year award recipient China Doll at the Day of Pink 2018 awards gala in Ottawa.

MP Karen Vecchio (Elgin — Middlesex — London) and Calla Barnett (right), Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity Board President, at the Day of Pink 2018 awards gala in Ottawa.

areas where there are public fruits and vegetables to be enjoyed. These bite-sized benevolent actions, in aggregate, create a global map of free produce available to anyone.

Dave Palibroda is an active participant, based in Saskatoon. He says when he first looked up his own city (named after a berry), and was surprised to see the only places listed were two dumpsters. "Seeing the lack of data I felt obligated to start adding to the Falling Fruit map."

"I actively look for and listen for stories of edible fruit around town," Palibroda says. "I bike everywhere and I often come across different food trees and shrubs while out and about."

Palibroda loves sharing local knowledge of edible fruit that can be freely foraged. "Most of the trees have way too much fruit for any one person to use and definitely shouldn't be kept secret."

Although he doesn't view his contributions as volunteering per se, his pinning of perishables to the Falling Fruit project have contributed to a greater awareness for one public garden in particular: The Patterson Garden at the University of Saskatoon.

"I never really knew anything about it until I went on a walking tour of it." He says the professor giving the tour showed the group all kinds of edible plants growing there. "It's in an area where winters get



Photo Credit: Derek Hille

down past -40 °C and people think it's too cold to grow anything, but at the Patterson Garden they are growing things like apples, pears, plums, crabapples, cranberries, chokecherries, gooseberries, saskatoons, currants, hazelnuts, walnuts, pinenuts, hawthorn, grapes, schisandra berries, kiwis and mulberries."

Although open to the public, the gardens risk losing funding if people don't know about the gardens and don't visit them. "I felt I could help by spreading the word and putting all the edible fruit in

the Patterson Garden on Falling Fruit," says Palibroda.

Overall, microvolunteering is a relatively new trend in philanthropy that's only beginning to harvest the fruits of its full potential.

"While there has been no massive explosion in microvolunteering, the idea is gaining traction," says Craig Kielburger, the person who introduced me to the Falling Fruit project. Craig is a Canadian activist, Member of the

Order of Canada, and co-founder (with his brother Marc) of Free the Children and WE charity.

The Kielburgers' WE charity is a global children's empowerment organization, most popular for its WE Day events. Held across Canada, the U.S., the U.K, and the Caribbean, WE Days invite big-name performers and speakers to charm arenas filled with youth. How did these youth get their tickets to WE Day events? They earned them by volunteering.

This may come as no surprise, as a recent Statistics Canada report said that "[i]n general, younger Canadians are more likely to volunteer than older Canadians," citing that approximately half of people aged 15 to 44 reported doing volunteer work in the most recent year of the survey (2010).

Yet, according to the report, young people devote far fewer hours to volunteering than seniors: "youths aged 15 to 24 and younger adults aged 25 to 34 recorded only about one-half as many hours as seniors."

So, how come fewer seniors volunteer, and why do those who volunteer give proportionally more time to their causes? StatsCan says the key reason in general is lack of time; and for seniors who do have time, they must also have health. "When seniors were asked why they did not volunteer, 58% of 65- to 74-year-olds and 78% of those 75 and older said that their health was one of the most important reasons," according to StatsCan.

Here's where microvolunteering can help.

Thanks to apps and websites, the microvolunteering trend is allowing those with limited time, mobility, or health to contribute what they can, when they can, and from where they are comfortable.

"The Internet has been the driving force behind microvolunteering opportunities," says Craig. I ask him if he thinks that's a barrier for seniors.

"[W]e don't believe in the old cliché that grandma can't work a computer. But if some seniors are struggling with the technology, our suggestion is to head over to the local public library where there are free-to-use computers and a librarian who will undoubtedly be happy to teach them how to surf the net and find microvolunteering opportunities."

One popular online tool for finding these opportunities is GlobalGivingTime ([globalgiving.sparked.com](http://globalgiving.sparked.com)). Here, you can sign up and specify your skills and interests. The site then suggests organizations looking for help with projects that match your skills, or you can search for microvolunteering opportunities on your own.

Day of Pink — an international day that celebrates diversity — used the website several years ago when they were seeking help with education resources like posters and guidebooks. Although based in Canada, they saw volunteers give their time and skills internationally.

Day of Pink is itself a micro-action, encouraging people to wear pink on the second Wednesday of April to raise awareness to stop all forms of bullying including homophobia, transphobia, and transmisogyny. "Homophobia and transphobia remain ongoing challenges for so many of us," says Jeremy Dias, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity, "and I think this is an accessible way for a lot of people to participate."

This bite-sized act stands for a symbol of change, and creates a spark for conversation and education. The conversation piece Dias says is critical for getting people talking, and challenging discrimination:

"LGBTQ+ issues are unapproachable for a lot of people, a lot of people don't understand how easy it is to challenge bullying discrimination, homophobia, transphobia and oppression. It's about dismantling systems that hurt people."

Although Day of Pink rallies its main efforts around one day, "the work that we're doing is about creating safer spaces everyday, all the time," says Dias.

The larger goal is not just to get people talking about bullying, but struggles of any kind, no matter your age, gender, or sexual orientation.

Overall, microvolunteering is a relatively new trend in philanthropy that's only beginning to harvest the fruits of its full potential.



Photo credit: Joanne Stevenson

Brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger, international activists and co-founders of the WE charity, on stage at Ottawa WE Day 2016.





The crowd of students and teachers holding up cellphone lights at Ottawa WE Day 2016. WE Day attendees earn their tickets through volunteering.

## Get Involved

**WE Day**  
we.org

.....

**Falling Fruit**  
fallingfruit.org

.....

**Day of Pink**  
dayofpink.org

.....

**Micro Day**  
microvolunteeringday.com

“One of the things we’re noticing is it’s not just young people, it’s also adults, it’s also seniors, it’s also retirees, and I think the challenges we’re facing as queer and trans folks are not unique to queer and trans folks, many people experience challenges at all stages of their life, and I think there’s a need to recognize and support people who are struggling.”

Microvolunteering has its own day of observance, and it’s also in April. Since 2016, ‘Micro Day’ has been celebrated on April 15, with microvolunteering platforms, organizations and volunteers joining together in a synchronized effort to demonstrate the potential of the microvolunteering concept.

Micro Day may have come and gone for this year, but as Day of Pink shows, everyday is a good day to get involved.

Why not start your own microvolunteering club? Craig suggests visiting the library with a few friends once or twice a week, spending an hour on the computers looking for micro-actions to help with and chatting with each other as you “change the world!”

“Of course, microvolunteering isn’t exclusively electronic,” says Craig. He points out there are many other small things you can do from home “like chopping veggies for the local soup kitchen, or preparing a meal for a food delivery service.”

Whether online or off, you can quietly contact local service organizations to find out what little jobs would make a big difference.

I’m reminded of Needham’s words from my car radio: “It’s not by being louder, it’s by being tiny and real.” ■

**After record rebates in 2017  
Management Expense Ratio  
is 1.02% vs 2.13%  
category average**


➤

Savings of  
**52%**


**TRADEX  
EQUITY  
FUND  
LIMITED**

Founded by Public Servants  
in **April 1960** exclusively  
for Public Servants and their  
families

**Available directly  
through Tradex in  
Ontario, Quebec &  
British Columbia or  
through quality dealers  
& discount brokers in  
all Canadian  
jurisdictions**



Tradex Management Inc.  
www.tradex.ca | 1600-85 Albert St., Ottawa, ON K1P 6A4  
info@tradex.ca | 613-233-3394



Commissions, trailing commissions, management fees and expenses may all be associated with mutual fund investments. Please read the prospectus before investing. Mutual funds are not guaranteed, their values change frequently, and past performances may not be repeated.