

Ramps stopping the gap

Everyday Political Citizens

Campaign aims to help the disabled in Toronto



Luke Simcoe
Metro|Toronto

Every year, Samara Canada's Everyday Political Citizen project honours Canadians who are making positive changes in their communities. The winner of the contest will be announced Dec. 3, 2015.

Metro is profiling the four EPC nominees in the Greater Toronto Area. Today, we meet Luke Anderson, whose StopGap initiative is helping make Toronto more accessible for those with disabilities.

After graduating from the University of Waterloo in 2002, Luke Anderson moved to British Columbia to pursue his dream of competitive mountain biking.

The dream was cut short after a serious bike crash



Luke Anderson shows off one of his StopGap ramps in Toronto's Kensington Market neighbourhood. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE

left him paralyzed.

"In a split second my life changed," he said.

"All of a sudden I was introduced to a world that's not well suited to someone who uses a wheelchair."

Anderson landed a job at an engineering firm in Toronto

but became frustrated when the entrance to the building wasn't wheelchair accessible.

"Every time I wanted to enter or exit the building someone had to set up a ramp for me," he said.

That frustration became the fuel for StopGap, a cam-

campaign that constructs ramps for businesses whose entrances are blocked by stairs or other obstacles.

What started with 13 brightly-coloured ramps in the Junction neighbourhood has grown to about 500 ramps across Toronto, and as many

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It's not us that have disabilities; it's the places that we live work and play that are disabled.

Luke Anderson

as 800 total in Canada.

"That was the proudest moment for me. When we started to see the work we were doing here inspiring other groups to do the same in their cities and use our recipe," Anderson said.

Anderson said he chose the term StopGap for two reasons. It conveys his desire to create a "world free of physical barriers," but also reminds people the ramps are only a temporary solution.

"A brightly-coloured ramp can change someone's perception about how accessible their own neighbourhood is, but our end goal is to not see these things. They should become an invisible feature in our landscapes, just like curb cuts."