

Megan Kashner takes Benevolent giving to the next level

By [Shia Kapos](#) December 05, 2012

Jessie is homeless and wants a laptop to help him look for work. Alisha needs car repairs so she can take her children to school. **Megan Kashner** is linking up Jessie and Alisha with donors who want to know the people they're helping.

Ms. Kashner is CEO of **Benevolent.net**, an online venture she started a year ago this month. It allows donors to view the personal stories of people with one-time needs and give to their causes. It's similar to other cyber-giving efforts (**Desiree Vargas Wrigley** talks about **Giving Tuesday here**) but instead of looking for big-ticket donations, Benevolent focuses on smaller needs.

In the case of Jessie, three donors have committed \$60 toward the \$555 effort. Both Jessie and Alisha have a Dec. 15 deadline to raise the needed funds. If the goals aren't met, donors want their monies pushed to another good cause. The recipients are featured in videos and have been vetted by social service and nonprofit agencies that aren't able to meet their needs.

"It's all about a filling the gaps of the safety net," says Ms. Kashner, who has worked in nonprofits for many years, most recently at the Taproot Foundation, an organization that helps nonprofits market themselves.

"There are so many instances in which a low-income individual faces a challenge or hurdle that would only cost \$200 or \$400 to get past. But when they can't get past that hurdle, it sets them back and ends up costing our social safety net thousands of dollars and disappointments," Ms. Kashner says over oatmeal at Le Peep, a restaurant near her office in Evanston.

On one side, she says, "we've got all these low-income individuals who but for \$200, \$500, could be moving forward toward their goals and toward sustainability." And on the other, "we've got people who have the ability to give, who are increasingly making it clear to us they want to know who they're helping, how they're helping and exactly what's happening with their dollars. With today's technology we can make that possible."

Benevolent's crowd-sourcing approach to philanthropy recently grabbed the attention of the White House, which invited her to be present along with seven other panelists at a forum on innovation and philanthropy.

In the next six months, Benevolent will expand to other cities across the country.

Ms. Kashner hopes one day to see the effort to zero in on individual needs become so common that you might be standing in line at the grocery store, and instead of a checker asking "Would you like to donate to prostate cancer?" they'd ask, "Would you like to give to help Joe down the street?"
