

# Epic cross-Canada trek aims to change lives

TYLER ORTON  
24 hours

Joe Roberts spent years pushing a shopping cart through Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, scraping by as a homeless, teenage heroin addict before finally hitting his breaking point and accepting family help.

He is returning to his old stomping grounds this Saturday — shopping cart in tow — following a nearly 1,000-kilometre trek on foot from Calgary in a quest to offer homeless youth his help.

"The shopping cart represents an outcome — the outcome being homelessness," the Coquitlam resident, now president of a multimedia company, explained before arriving in Abbotsford Monday.

His Push for Change campaign began as a way to offer youth the same opportunities he had to escape life on the street.



Joe Roberts, 45, spent eight weeks shoving a shopping cart from Calgary to Vancouver in his Push for Change campaign — part of an effort to eliminate youth homelessness. PHOTO SUBMITTED

The journey from Alberta is part of a trial run for a planned cross-Canada trek next year to raise \$10 million — a goal he doesn't believe impossible considering his background.

Roberts recalls the height of his addiction during his late

teens when drug issues led to friends overdosing, suicide and prison time.

"My life was frickin' miserable," he said, adding he wants to help homeless youths avoid the same outcome and realize their own self-worth — some-

thing that helped get him off the streets.

In early July, he set off from Calgary, waking at 5 a.m. to push a cart 24 kilometres each day and speaking to communities about his cause.

"The only thing that we didn't

learn this summer is what it's going to be like to (travel in) winter," he said, pointing out the cross-country journey will take him through Edmonton in January.

But Roberts adds he's been able to keep up with the physical demands so far.

"I'm kind of excited that at 45-years-old I was able to push a shopping cart from Calgary," he said laughing, adding it's the mental strain that's taken the biggest toll.

Living in a RV with two other guys — his road manager and a filmmaker documenting the trial run — made him appreciate creature comforts like sleeping in a bed with his wife all the more.

"What I do on those tough days is I focus on the kids I know are going to be impacted by this."

Roberts will arrive at Harbour Light Detox (119 E. Cordova St.) this Saturday at 1 p.m.