



The man behind the cart, Joe Roberts, shows off his shopping cart pushing skills last Thursday morning in Belleville.

<http://www.emcbelleville.ca/20120503/news/Roberts+aims+at+tackling+youth+homelessness>

## **Roberts aims at tackling youth homelessness**

Posted May 3, 2012 By [Michael J Brethour](#)

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*Michael J Brethour, Belleville EMC*

EMC News -Belleville -It may be odd, quirky, or even a little strange but Joe Roberts is committed to pushing a shopping cart across Canada.

The visual image that comes to mind right away may have the average reader thinking perhaps Roberts needs some expert help, but **the Loyalist College graduate** and former homeless drug addicted street kid and now successful businessman sees the cart as a symbol that will turn heads.

Roberts chatted with the EMC last week and demonstrated some of his shopping cart pushing prowess while he talked about his exciting new endeavour.

Roberts is planning to push a shopping cart across Canada in 2013 to build awareness and support for homeless youth in Canada, during The Push for Change: Uniting for Homeless Youth.

He and business partner Sean Richardson, a sport psychologist, are hoping to create a call to action to get people involved and inspire businesses to contribute to the fund-raising campaign.

"What if we could catch them before they graduate to the worst postal code in Canada?" he asked.

The 45-year-old from Midland explained the idea of pushing a shopping cart across Canada came after a corporate engagement project in Montreal last year.

"We took 350 people outside on a homeless immersion project. In 30 hours we made them make sandwiches for homeless kids on the street and we had them panhandle within the subway system in Montreal and a large number of them slept outside in the Bell Centre parking lot," he explained.

Roberts noted he is well aware of the issues of homelessness having spent seven years on the streets of Vancouver's East end as a youth.

Those years were spawned by drug use at a young age.

"My story is that I lost sight of the idea of how much of an extraordinary person I could be," he explained.

After reaching rock bottom he made a call for help and went to rehab.

In the 1990s Roberts came to Belleville as part of his recovery plan through vocational rehabilitation and took the general arts program and followed up with business marketing and graduated from Loyalist in 1996.

"I'm a story of possibility mindset. Is it probable that a 45-year-old business guy could push a shopping cart across Canada? No. Is it possible? Yes. Entering into that possibility is a metaphor of the tough work we are taking on, which is tackling the issue of youth homelessness, a massive issue," he said.

The idea is for politicians and mayors and business leaders to help push the cart with him, generating funds to support existing services for homeless youth. Though awareness of the issue is a positive by-product of the initiative, he firmly stated that is not the focus of the event.

"If all we do is create awareness then we would have failed as a project," he said. "Engagement is the key, if we can get enough people wrapped around this and they get their hearts in it we can make a real impact."

Roberts said the allowance of 14 months to finish the trek across Canada underlines the importance of the cause.

"This is not a marathon. I want to meet as many people as I can as I cross the country," he said. "The pushing of the cart is the easy part. It's building the national campaign that is going to be difficult, it's going to be hard to engage people through ten provinces and get a million kids behind this," he said. Roberts' journey will cover the most densely populated regions of Canada, with events, public experiences and appearances throughout the nation. The Push for Change: Uniting for Homeless Youth will begin in St. John's, Newfoundland, in June and is expected to make its way through Belleville with a special event at Loyalist College sometime in the fall.

Roberts said his trek will be covered via a blog, a Facebook page and YouTube videos.

Roberts made his first million in sales before he was 35 years old. He became the CEO of Skid Row, one of Vancouver's leading multimedia firms. He also published *The Seven Secrets to Profit from Adversity* and was recognized by *Maclean's Magazine* as one of ten Canadians who have made a difference.

For more information on The Push for Change: Uniting for Homeless Youth or to contribute to Robert's efforts visit < [www.thepushforchange.com](http://www.thepushforchange.com) >.