

Cart carries a message

The man known as the Skid Row CEO visited Langley Tuesday during a 1,000 kilometre walk

By Heather Colpitts, Langley Advance August 23, 2012



Joe Roberts is just completing a walk from Calgary to Vancouver with a modified shopping cart to spotlight at-risk youth.

Photograph by: Heather Colpitts , Langley Advance

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Joe Roberts isn't the first person to wheel a shopping cart into Douglas Park and stop for a rest.

The man known as the Skid Row CEO is using the iconic shopping cart - the transportation and sometimes home for many homeless people - to garner attention for youth homelessness and help at risk youth.

He's within a couple of days of completing the Push For Change, a journey from Calgary to Vancouver during July and August. He stopped in communities along the way, including Langley Aug. 21 for a youth barbecue and a visit to the Gateway of Hope shelter.

"This is a training trek," Roberts said. "We needed to really understand the issues."

The 1,000-kilometre trek was to work out the bugs for an 8,000-kilometre journey across Canada, and the plan is to start May 1, 2013, in Newfoundland.

Roberts is the first to admit he's an unlikely long distance trekker.

"I'm a 45-year-old non-athlete," he said. So when he was tired on the route, he would think of the cause.

"When it gets tough, I close my eyes and see those kids," he said. "I remember that we're doing this "on purpose" and you dig deeper and find the steam."

Along the route people have donated to the cause. Roberts noted that 100 per cent of donations will go to help homeless youth thanks to corporate sponsorship to cover the trek costs.

The money will go for either existing programs for youth at risk or to develop new ones, in the two key areas of prevention and recovery. The first helps young people get through school, build self-esteem, and get them set for adult life before their life goes off the rails.

"Get at the root cause, when kids are 12 or 13 and kids begin to have that fractured sense of self worth," he commented.

The recovery programs include shelter, addictions help, counselling, and practical skills training.

Find out more about Roberts' campaign at www.thepushforchange.com and find their updates and videos on Facebook.

Roberts visited Langley in 2009 for the opening of the Gateway of Hope, offering inspiration to people on the streets.

In 1989, he was a homeless young heroin addict on East Hastings and found help at the Salvation Army to get off drugs.

Roberts is realistic, acknowledging that homelessness will never be eliminated entirely, but he wants to have an impact on youth homelessness.

It's the thing that we believe we can have the most impact," he said. © Copyright (c) Langley Advance