

Push for Change campaign director praises Roots for Youth

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Joe Roberts and his wife Marie made an appearance at the Pictou County Roots for Youth fundraiser on Saturday. After navigating Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, Roberts and his team crossed into P.E.I. on Saturday. Roberts, who became a homeless drug addict and alcoholic in Vancouver in the late 1980s before turning his life around a few years later, is pushing a shopping cart across Canada and expects to finish in September 2017.

NEW GLASGOW- Joe Roberts is well aware of the value that organizations like Pictou County Roots for Youth can offer a community.

Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across Canada, in an effort he's calling the Push for Change, to raise awareness about youth homelessness and expects to finish in the fall of 2017.

"It is the unseen homelessness that Roots for Youth addresses," said Roberts, who told his story to a group of teams participating in the non-profit's Routes to Riches race fundraiser on Saturday.

He traces his addictions back to his hometown of Midland, Ont., "a town much like this one," he said of New

Glasgow.

After his father died when he was eight, his mother was remarried to an abusive alcoholic, he said. Unable to cope with that toxic environment, he turned to drugs and alcohol.

“It was a place I ran to for the next 15 years of my life,” he said.

Roberts left home in his mid-teens, ill equipped to deal with the issues and struggles that life threw at him.

By the time he was 16, he had made his way to Canada’s west coast, where things only got tougher for him on Vancouver’s notoriously tough east side.

“In 1989, I was a teenager pushing a shopping cart around the streets of Vancouver, collecting cans and bottles to support a drug dependency.”

However, forging a happy ending for himself, he would later prove there is a way out: with the help of his mother, he got cleaned up and went on to be the CEO of a multi-million-dollar company, his picture on the cover of Canadian Business and Maclean’s magazine.

“Early detection and prevention is the key” to helping young people in trouble before the problems can mount, he said.

“(Roots for Youth) gives possibilities, a doorway opening for young people.”

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