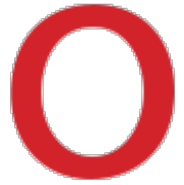


How One Man Is Fighting To End Youth Homelessness With Support From Canada's Unions

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On the worst day of Joe Roberts' life, he was homeless and barefoot under a bridge in Vancouver, having just sold the boots off his feet to fuel his heroin addiction. That was almost thirty years ago.

Unlike far too many of Canada's estimated 35,000 homeless youth, Joe was able to find a path out of that world and went on to achieve great success in the business world. With the help of his mother and a strong support network, Roberts got clean, went to school for sales and marketing, landed a job, and excelled. In a short time, he was CEO of a successful multimedia company, Mindware Design Communications, which he led to an 800 percent increase in business. "I achieved everything I'd ever wanted to before I was 35," says Roberts. "My bucket list was ticked, but I wasn't any happier or more fulfilled inside. That's when I started asking myself what my legacy was going to be."



Rags to riches to advocacy

On May first of this year, Roberts began pushing a shopping cart, a symbol of his past life on the streets, in St. John's, Newfoundland, and he's not going to stop until he has pushed that cart all the way to Vancouver, British Columbia, a trek he projects will take him seventeen months. This bold charity initiative is called *The Push for Change* and is working to end youth homelessness.

**2,200 km walked
and counting...**



Roberts was in Fredericton, almost 2,000 kilometers into his 9,000 kilometer journey when I spoke with him. "Terry Fox gave us this tremendous template," he says. "He showed us that when you take on a massive challenge like this, Canadians will rise up and meet you."

And, rise up to meet him Canadians have, particularly the unions. The United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry (UA Canada) has been the biggest partner in getting *The Push for Change* off the ground, and it all started almost by accident. “Last August I had the opportunity to speak at the UA Annual General Meeting,” explains Roberts. “I was just there to tell my story and talk about possibility. And, at the end, I said 'Oh, and I'm doing this walk across Canada to try to create a better future for young Canadians.' I wasn't trying to pitch them, but they were so inspired that they put a motion on the floor then and there to support *The Push for Change*.”

The silent givers

Now that Roberts has had an opportunity for an inside look at the way union giving operates, his opinion of them is forever changed. “I've learned about how unions strengthen our communities,” says Roberts. “They are the backbone of the middle class and they are deeply involved in philanthropy. It's one of the greatest secrets never told.”

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UA Canada's support of *The Push for Change* is hardly an outlier. “Our members are always there to give a helping hand when somebody needs it,” says Bruce Myles, Business Manager of UA Local 325 in Fredericton. “When we join these unions, it's a brotherhood and sisterhood. And, we try to look after everybody. We support a lot of charities, but we don't really advertise it.”

By supporting *The Push for Change* the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters are hoping to fix more than pipes and leaks — they are taking on challenges that benefit the greater good of all Canadians. Through Joe's efforts and the support of the UA, the way society thinks about homelessness is being shifted, as is the way Unions are viewed in Canada. And, there's one thing Joe is certain of. “You don't need to convince people to do good,” he tells me with confidence. “You just have to give them a doorway and people *will* step up.”