



Former homeless youth-turned-CEO Joe Roberts pushes his cart into Kingston, Ont. on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2016 during his cross-country walk to highlight the problem of youth homelessness. His Push for Change initiative started in Newfoundland on May 1, 2016 and he expects to end it in Vancouver on Sept. 30, 2017. He arrives in Peterborough Sunday. Michael Lea The Whig-Standard

Joe Roberts went from homeless teen to business success story, and now he wants to help others do the same.

Roberts will be in Peterborough on Sunday as part of his Push For Change campaign. He's been pushing a shopping cart across Canada on a 517-day trek to raise funds to deal with youth homelessness.

He plans to complete his 9,000-kilometre journey in Vancouver next September.

Roberts, formerly homeless but now a rehabilitated drug addict, has set an ambitious \$17.5 million goal, with about \$125,000 of that target achieved to date. Every cent raised goes toward the cause, with Roberts' travelling expenses covered by sponsors.

"We want to leave a part of it in the communities we trek through," he said. "The other portions we want to invest in school-based prevention models."

Peterborough's Youth Emergency Shelter (YES) and the United Way welcome Roberts Sunday when he arrives in Peterborough.

A soup lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to noon, followed by audience questions as Roberts shares his story. It all happens in the auditorium at The Mount Community Centre at 1545 Monaghan Rd.

People can register for the event at [www.pushforchangeptbo.eventbrite.ca](http://www.pushforchangeptbo.eventbrite.ca). The cost is \$10 per ticket.

Roberts, now 49, began his recovery in Belleville decades ago after escaping the grips of addiction and homelessness in Vancouver. His drug and alcohol counsellor encouraged him to enrol at Loyalist College. Following four years of study, Roberts graduated from the marketing and sales program with honours.

"I went out into the business world and I began to apply myself with the skills I learned in this city," he said. "In less than 12 years I went from a kid entering a treatment centre, to being on the cover of Macleans Magazine, as a celebrated entrepreneur."

Roberts was driven to use his success story as a motivational tool for youth struggling with homelessness.

"We decided to walk across Canada pushing that symbol of homelessness, the shopping cart, talking about what we need to do to better protect young people" he said. Roberts is in support of preventative measures aimed at reaching at-risk youth, some who may be battling mental health and addiction woes, at a stage before they end up on the street.

Family conflict was behind what drove Roberts toward the streets, as a teen.

"I didn't have the skills to manage," he said. "That's the case for 35,000 young people every year in this country."

- *With files from Jason Miller, The Belleville Intelligencer*