

Push for Change campaign hits Simcoe County, reaches halfway point

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News

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Joe Roberts brings Push of Change campaign to his hometown | Rick Vanderlinde/Metroland

Early on in his Push for Change campaign, Joe Roberts was mistaken for a newspaper deliveryman.

He was walking his modified shopping cart through a city in Newfoundland in June 2016 when a woman asked if he had any papers left.

Today, halfway through his 9,000-kilometre cross-Canada trek, Roberts has become a much-anticipated arrival on the streets of Ontario.

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“This morning somebody pulled over and gave me a Timmies (Tim Hortons coffee), and \$20, and a high five,” Roberts said Jan. 3.

Roberts, 50, is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to raise awareness and money for youth homelessness. His walk ends in Vancouver September 2017 after 517 days on the road. Along with raising his profile, Roberts has collected \$350,000 for the Raising the Roof organization. His goal is \$17 million — 50 cents for every Canadian. And while he’s far from the figure, Roberts is hopeful.

“The size of donations has changed. There seems to be a snowball. It’s not uncommon for us to go to an event and be presented with a \$3,000 to \$5,000 cheque, or a \$10,000 cheque. That’s encouraging,” he said.

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But some of the smallest donations are the most meaningful. While travelling through Ramara Township, five young boys gave Roberts their piggy bank money.

Looking ahead, Roberts is in talks to meet Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. And the Push for Change will fly in to Iqaluit, Yellowknife and Whitehorse in 2017.

“The northern communities are very important. They have a homelessness problem that’s proportionately out of whack,” Roberts said.

Raising awareness is just as valuable as raising funds, Roberts said. He’s received emails from communities informing him of the positive outcome he’s left behind. Individuals have joined boards committed to helping the homeless, others have joined shelters, or made significant donations to their community-based organizations, Roberts said.

“Changing the state of homelessness in a country is a process, not an event,” he said.

Roberts was crossing the country in an RV, but he has been staying in hotels since November. He walks 24 kilometres daily, mostly in cities and towns and to engagement events, and drives unsafe portions of the route like highways.

Winter is taking a physical toll. Walking through snow and slush: “It’s like walking in sand. Imagine walking 24 kilometres in beach sand. The calves really fire up,” he said.

On Jan. 9, Roberts will arrive in Midland, his birthplace and hometown for his first nine years. He will speak at St. Theresa’s Catholic High School and students will join a portion of his walk in town. He will speak to children in Orillia Jan. 10.

More Information

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

For more information about The Push for Change campaign or to make a donation, visit thepushforchange.com.



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