

'This is my pay it forward': One man's push to end youth homelessness

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Joe Roberts' journey began 30 years ago when he was living on the streets.

"By the time I was 19, I was pushing a shopping cart around the streets of east Vancouver, collecting bottles to support drug dependency," Roberts said.

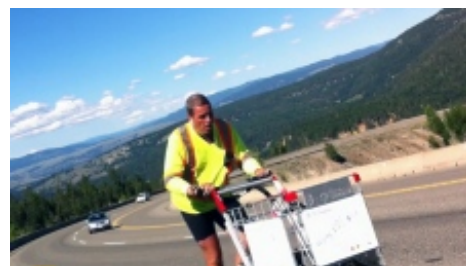
Roberts turned his life around, going to college and becoming CEO of Mindware Design Communications. His business success put him on the front of MacLean's magazine, but he never forgot where he came from.

Photos

Joe Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across Canada in the hopes of raising money for homeless youth initiatives.

"I made a promise on a street corner 25 years ago that if I ever got a second chance at life, I would pay it forward," he said. "This is my pay it forward."

He's paying it forward one step at a time, as he makes a 17 month journey across the country with his custom-made shopping cart.



"It's a symbol of chronic homelessness, the very thing we're trying to avoid," Roberts said. "Along the way, you can mobilize communities, you can talk to schools, you can bring stakeholders together and really talk about what we can do more on that prevention model, while supporting the emergency services sector."

The national trek, [The Push for Change](#), began in St. John's, Nfld. on May 1, 2016, and will end on Sept. 30 in Vancouver, B.C. On Wednesday, Roberts took a break from his walk on the Trans-Canada Highway to speak to more than 600 delegates at the Saskatchewan Safety Council's annual conference in Regina.

"It's all about safety at the end of the day," Ryan Jacobson, CEO of the Saskatchewan Safety Council, said. "Homelessness is a significant injury situation for children, specifically, and adults that find themselves in homeless situations."

When the push comes through Saskatchewan later this year, Roberts will donate 50 per cent of his fundraising money back into the province. The money will benefit the Street Culture Project, Egadz and Souls Harbour Rescue Mission. Mike Gerrand, director of operations from the Street Culture Project, says Roberts represents a "don't quit" attitude he sees reflected in the youth his organization helps.

"A lot of the youth that we serve do need somebody to not judge them, to not quit on them," Gerrand said. "We have some wonderful people that work for our organization who will be inspired by a walk like (Roberts')."

Roberts says one of his goals is to implement the Upstream Project in schools to identify at-risk youth before they end up on the street like he did.

"The shopping cart and the walk across Canada (are) to raise awareness so that no kid in this country ends up on the street, pushing a shopping cart," Roberts said.

The Push for Change will walk into Saskatchewan on May 8.