

# Homelessness can be 'invisible' - Chronicle Journal: Local News

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By John Nagy, CJ staff

Periodically homeless from the age of 15 to 22, Joe Roberts was down and out on the mean streets of east side Vancouver in the late 1980s.

Except for drops of rain, no rays of sunshine were cascading down on the shoulders of this drug addict.

But life sometimes has a way of turning things around and nobody knows that shift better than Roberts.

After moving back into his mother's house in Barrie, Ont. — and with the help of an OPP officer after a failed threat of suicide — Roberts went clean.

His story is an inspirational one. From there, he got his high school equivalency, took business marketing and sales studies at Belleville's Loyalist College, parlayed that into a few sales jobs and eventually started up the company Mindware Design Communications in Vancouver.

Pulling down a six-figure salary before he was 35, it's not all about Roberts anymore.

Looking for ways to give back, the 50-year-old entrepreneur/motivational speaker started The Push for Change, a 9,000-kilometre trek across Canada in aid of youth homelessness, something he knows all too well.

Three years living under a Vancouver viaduct gave him plenty of perspective.

"Inside me was a possibility and I just needed people and a system to thrive in once I got that opportunity," said Roberts, who did a five-kilometre walk around Boulevard Lake with Thunder Bay supporters on Sunday. "I wanted to do something to pay it forward, to give back to a country that's really given me more than I deserved.

"Inside young people is that possibility, but they need those champions."

Roberts — who is pushing a homeless-symbolic shopping cart across the country in his travels — and his team set a lofty goal of \$17.5 million for the jaunt that started on May 1, 2016 and will end in Vancouver in September.

With approximately \$425,000 raised with the trek already halfway across the country, Roberts said the attention the cause is getting can't be bought.

"Regardless of the money we raise, we've raised the awareness level (of youth homelessness)," said Roberts, who is set to meet Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa on Tuesday.