

Man pushes grocery cart across Canada

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News

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Joe Roberts is over halfway done with his march across Canada pushing a grocery cart for a good cause.

He wants to *Push For Change*. He hopes that this campaign will help to raise awareness and work toward ending youth homelessness in Canada.

Roberts understands the plight of homeless youth, as he had a season of being homeless as a young person.

"In 1989 I was one of those chronically homeless people you'd see in the downtown core pushing a shopping cart. But I came from a normal family, I came from a good place. I left home too early, I got mixed up in drugs, and by the time I was 19 I was on the street."

He attributes his move out of homelessness to his mother and a police officer who helped when he needed it most.

He claims that he is the least likely candidate for doing something like this.

"When I was in high school I was not the guy who was sporty. I was not on the football team or the basketball team. And I'm 50 years old... I think one of the interesting things about the *Push For Change* is just that belief in possibility.

"That even though you don't think you can do something, you actually can."

Roberts says 235,000 Canadians find themselves homeless every year, and 20% of them are youth between the ages of 13 and 24.

"The issues that create homelessness include things like family conflict, generational poverty, abuse, drugs, and depression, things that create the environment for a young person to find themselves in the outer circle, so leaving home too early exists."

Joe Roberts at Clearspring Middle School in Steinbach, MB

He has been sharing his story of homelessness and hope in schools and speaking engagements across Canada as he makes his way west. Because of the many steps he's taken on his trek across the country, he's worn through at least 12 pairs of sneakers and several winter boots which he donates to the homeless once he's done each pair. He also keeps a running tally on his website of bowls of cereal and shots of espresso consumed, the later now being over 1400 shots.

"Regardless of if you're on the street or maybe just going through some stuff in life, the events that happen to us don't define who we are. Bad things happen to good people every day. But inside each and every one of us, there is more to us than we can see. I sat on a park bench in 1989 and I had an old wise man named Gus say that to me. He said 'Joe, you've got this homeless addiction thing going on but if you were ever to find yourself you could do extraordinary things.' And I laughed that off, and I look back today 25 years later having graduated college, found myself on the cover of Canadian Business as a celebrated entrepreneur... yet at that point in my life I didn't think I was worth it... my advice to anybody listening whether you're going through stuff is to get up off the couch, or off the bench, and start walking. The actions have a way of creating new outcomes in our lives. They have a way of creating a different colour or emotion that gives us the confidence to move forward and discover whats on the other side of fear, adversity, challenge, and change."

On May 1, 2016, Roberts and his crew left St. John's, Newfoundland. Nearly a year and 6,500 km later, he is half-way across the country in Winnipeg. He plans to share his message with young people and media outlets across Canada as he pushes his shopping cart to his final destination in Vancouver, BC where he is expected to arrive by the end of September.

