

Push for Change brings campaign to end youth homelessness

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Push For Change's Joe Roberts and his custom shopping cart seen on the road during his 9,000 km journey across the country. He will roll into town later this week where he will participate in school and community events. Photo submitted

By Chris Marchand

After pushing a shopping cart for over 6,000 kilometres, former homeless youth turned CEO Joe Roberts is bringing his nationwide campaign through Dryden.

Roberts will attend a public reception at the Ontario Provincial Police detachment on Hwy. 17 at 11 a.m. Saturday, April 1.

Roberts' 517 day, 9,000km walk began in May 2016. Before it's all over he will have appeared at over 400 community and school events across the country in his efforts to tackle the problem of youth homelessness and its underlying causes.

Roberts champions the strategy of intervening earlier to help kids at risk get the help they might need and

developing models that can integrate with the school system to catch problems 'upstream' before youth end up on the streets.

"We don't need to wait until we see a kid sitting on a piece of cardboard to know they're in trouble," said Roberts. "We know they're in trouble in Grade 7 and 8. So I think we should be working upstream, inside the school system and looking at 'home-reconnect programs'. Also taking into account that there needs to be a tailored approach to how we address Aboriginal youth at risk, because there's a bunch of different challenges that we need to take into account, as well as with the LGBT community as well."

Encouraged by the Liberal government's investment in social housing in the recent federal budget, Roberts says it reflects changing perspectives on the underlying challenges facing people in a homelessness situation. He says he exists as a living example that people can be helped.

"I think that we're at a time where that's starting to shift — mental health, addiction — we're beginning to understand that this is more of a health care issue. I was one of those people you walked by on the streets who made you nervous. Yet inside me was a possibility and thanks to that social investment that this country made in me, I managed to turn my life around. Well, that's the case with 35,000 young people in this country. No kid plans to be homeless. It's not something you choose. So if they didn't choose it, then why do we judge them?"

MichaelChristianson

