

Roberts pushes for end to youth homelessness

BY IAN FROESE

A man pushing a shopping cart across Canada calls his journey an excuse.

It's his justification to have an audience with political leaders and people across the country, discussing an issue dear to his heart — youth homelessness.

"They're inspired by the actions taken before you even get to the microphone," said Joe Roberts, founder of The Push for Change, a campaign to end youth homelessness rolling into Brandon this weekend. "That gives you the platform, you've earned the right to talk about something."

"What other excuse would I have today, to walk into the City of Winnipeg and meet with the mayor?" he said by phone last week.

Roberts has experienced youth homelessness himself.

He dealt with trauma as a boy. His father died when he was young and his stepfather was abusive and unsupportive.

By nine, he began experimenting with drugs and he left home by 15.

You wouldn't have seen him sitting on a slab of cardboard in Barrie, Ont. He was couch surfing then, moving from one home to the next.

As an adult, he moved to Vancouver in the late 1980s, where his troubles with addiction and mental health worsened. He returned home in 1989 in an attempt to clean himself up.

He reached rock bottom when he attempted to kill himself. He applauds a police officer with pulling him from the brink of suicide.

The cop saw this young man, holding a gun in his mother's basement, not as a threat but a



Joe Roberts, who was once homeless, is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to raise awareness of youth homelessness and work to eradicate it. (Submitted)

person in crisis, Roberts explains.

He would be enrolled in a drug treatment program, return to school and enter the business world in Vancouver.

"In less than 12 years," from the day Roberts went sober, "I was on the cover of Canadian Business."

His business success, however, wasn't fulfilling. He had an epiphany one day, realizing he was lucky to have a pathway out of homelessness but not everyone does.

He became an inspirational speaker and author, forging ahead with a plan to walk across the country — to raise money, awareness and

also serve as a call for action.

He's more than halfway through his trek, which started last May. His 9,000-kilometre walk will conclude this September in Vancouver.

This weekend, a gala charity dinner and art auction will be held Saturday, April 29 at Brandon University's Harvest Hall. Doors open at 5 p.m. with a wine and cheese reception, followed by dinner at 6 p.m. Roberts will be the guest speaker.

On Monday, a Walk and Talk with Joe parade will start at the Healthy Living Centre at 2 p.m. and conclude at Princess Park. A

number of family fun events will commence at 4 p.m.

By walking cross-country, Roberts embarked on a personal challenge so difficult he'd have a story to tell for decades. It would be his platform to encouraging young people to do whatever they put their mind to.

Those conversations, he hopes, can prevent behaviours putting youth at risk, and inspire governments and businesses to invest in homelessness prevention tactics, as well as emergency services and sustainable housing for those already on the streets.

"Look, my story is inspiring, but inspiration doesn't change policy; pragmatic thinking changes policy, you have to have a plan."

In Brandon's last homelessness count, conducted April 13, 2016, 146 adult Brandonites were found homeless — 28 of whom were unsheltered and 118 were sheltered.

Tallying the number of children/dependents and those who declined to be surveyed, 206 people were identified.

Of those surveyed last year, 38 per cent of people were under the age of 30 — double the national average.

The Kiwanis Club of Brandon has helped organize Roberts' visit and the corresponding fundraising activities.

President Hamid Mumin said local homelessness isn't in the public eye too often, though it should be.

"Most people in Brandon aren't aware we have a problem, but it is here, and it's growing," he said.

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McCallum recognized for her leadership in the Brandon real estate community



Eleanor McCallum became the first recipient of the Brandon Realtor of Distinction Award for outstanding leadership and dedication in the industry.

McCallum, who works with HomeLife Home Professional Realty, is a recognized leader in the Brandon and area real estate community and is a household name in the Wheat City. McCallum is highly regarded by her colleagues for her honesty, integrity and vast knowledge of the real estate profession. Her career began in 1989 with Realty World. She has also served as president of the Brandon Real Estate Board and as education director for BREB for six years.

McCallum was elected President of the Manitoba Real Estate Association in 2005. In addition, she has served on MREA's education and professional standards committees for a number of years, where her responsibilities took a great deal of commitment and time as she traveled back and forth to Winnipeg to serve in these positions.

She was the founding Broker of HomeLife Home Professional Realty and has always shown a high degree of

leadership and professionalism in her role. She has earned the respect of all members of Brandon Area Realtors over the years and has served as a mentor to many.

She also initiated the annual HomeLife Home Professional Realty scholarship program that each year rewards a student in all three Brandon high schools. Plus two rural ones, to further their education.

In addition to her real estate leadership, McCallum has been active in a wide range of Brandon Community groups.

She is a founding member of the Riverview Curling Club and was recognized for her contributions to that organization as a Life Member of the Riverview Women's Curling Club. She is a member of the Assiniboine Kiwanis Club and an active participant in all their activities. Eleanor faithfully delivered Meals on Wheels to seniors and has always supported Women's Shelter and protection programs in Brandon.

» Submitted

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PMH offers sessions to combat food cravings

Prairie Mountain Health is hosting three sessions to help people understand their food cravings and how to control them.

Titled "Craving Change," the three free sessions are designed to help the public develop a healthier relationship with food.

Attendees will learn why they eat the things they do; strategies to control food cravings; and how to make and maintain healthy lifestyle

changes.

The sessions run May 2, 9 and 16 at Brandon University's Healthy Living Centre beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Space is limited. In order to sign up, call 1-877-509-7852.

» The Brandon Sun

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- \$5 Caesars & \$6 Mill Street Pints
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- Late Night Happy Hour from 9-11pm
- Student Night!