

The Push for Change walking to Maple Creek

Megan Roth

A simple shopping cart is often seen as a symbol for homelessness in Canada.

Now it is being used as a symbol of change.

Joe Roberts is taking 18 months to walk across the country, pushing a shopping cart to raise awareness and money for youth homelessness in the country.

Homelessness is on the rise, and even people in small towns should take notice.

"I know people in places think they don't have to worry because there isn't a problem with homelessness there," said Roberts.

"But the problems that can lead to homelessness often start at home, in those small towns like Maple Creek."

Roberts says there are precursors in every community, small and large, across the country that lead to homelessness.

Often those precursors start at home, with children and youth hav-

ing issues in school and with a bad home life, according to Roberts.

"I can guarantee there are kids in Maple Creek right now who are at risk," said Roberts.

Roberts himself was a homeless youth in Vancouver when he was 19 and 20 years old.

He says it started with a bad home life and no one knowing how to stop the chain of effects to keep him from a life of addiction and homelessness.

However, while living on the streets of Vancouver, a police officer and his mother helped to put his life back together and within 12 years he was working as a CEO of a multi-million dollar company.

Roberts has been using the walk across the country, which he began on May 1, 2016, to bring awareness to the issue and start communications within communities on how to stop the problem.

"I think my walk has



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Joe Roberts pushes his cart alongside the road.

allowed communities to come together and allows for better communication about this issue."

Roberts is hoping the discussion will bring about long-term solutions to youth homelessness rather than a reac-

tion-based solution seen in most communities in Canada.

Roberts says a housing first method can help to end homelessness in Canada.

"Look at communities as close as Medicine Hat. They have a housing first and their homeless problem has greatly gone down," said Roberts.

Roberts' walk is also used as an educational tool.

He has spoken to children as young as pre-kindergarten to RCMP officers to government officials.

Each talk he gives is tailored to the group he is speaking to.

When speaking to RCMP officers and teachers Roberts often speaks about warning signs and the root causes for homelessness.

Government officials often have a similar talk with the added what can be done to help end the problem.

"I want people to know how easy it can

happen and to find a better way to address it."

Roberts will be bringing the walk to Maple Creek on June 7. He will be using the town as a "home base" while doing talks and events throughout the Southwest over about 10 days.

Currently there are no events or talks planned for Maple Creek, but Roberts is ready to give a talk to students, RCMP officers, Town Council or even church groups if asked.

A walk of one, two or five kilometres can also be arranged with Roberts.

"We are ready and more than willing to come out and talk or walk with anyone," he said.

Anyone looking to arrange an event or talk with Roberts can do so by reaching out to his wife, and campaign manager, Marie Marcoux-Roberts through the website www.thepushforchange.com.