

Push for Change comes to P.A.

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By [Tyler Marr](#)

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Joe Roberts is walking across Canada pushing a shopping cart in an attempt to raise awareness for youth homelessness. He spoke Monday to Wesmor Community High School. Tyler Marr/paNOW Staff

There are nearly 65,000 homeless youth across Canada, and numerous others are on the verge of this life.

This is where Joe Roberts comes in.

The executive director of The Push for Change, a national walk to raise awareness about youth homelessness, was once a young man living on the streets of East Vancouver.

"I got sober because someone told me one day I could. We don't get to change unless the heart inspires the mind and the feet into action. I wanted to do something to pay it forward," Roberts said to students at Wesmor Community High School.

"It is also important to get young people engaged. You get kids doing things, then they grow and become better global citizens."

The retired tech entrepreneur is pushing a shopping cart across the country - 24 kilometres a day - to show youth life is full of possibilities.

Though not scheduled to walk through Prince Albert, Roberts was eager to make the stop. He cited the work the

high school had undertaken to collect nonperishables and contribute to the campaign.

Youth are at risk of homelessness in P.A. and other small communities. Some may think it is a Regina or Vancouver problem, but this, Roberts said, was wrong.

“We need to get the kids and the public to learn what youth homelessness is before you see a kid on a piece of cardboard. [It's] Mental health, early childhood trauma and family conflict,” he said. “These aren't bad kids. They are vulnerable children. We can do better to support them,” he said. “If you don't get in front of it, you will never see a sunset on the issue.”

Roberts said the key to combating the issue is implementing prevention measures. It costs governments more for emergency services than preventative ones.

With almost 400 events scheduled on his 9,200 kilometre journey across Canada, he said after each event, those in attendance, often feel inspired.

“I am hoping that at some point in their lives when they are faced with tough stuff, that they walk out of this room knowing that there is a new and different possibility.”

tyler.marr@jpbjg.ca

On Twitter: @Journomarr

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