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- Joe Roberts.

THE PUSH FOR CHANGE

The Push For Change, a cross-Canada walk for youth homelessness, arrived in Canmore on July 7.

Founded by Joe Roberts, The Push For Change was created to show support and raise funds and awareness for 35,000 Canadian youth living on the streets.

A former homeless youth turned CEO, Roberts has already pushed his shopping cart 7,781 kilometres across the country. His arrival in Canmore will mark 7,925 km into his 9,220 km journey from the east coast to B.C.

Roberts uses his personal experience as a former drug addict and homeless youth in Vancouver to demonstrate a person who turned his life around, got clean, returned to school, and became the successful CEO of a multimedia company.

The shopping cart is a symbol of Joe's transformation from youth homelessness, and it represents the very outcome we are trying to avoid for future generations.

“As of today I've walked almost 7,900 km. Today we started in Kananaskis and walked into Dead Man's Flats and

there's something surreal about knowing you've been across three quarters of the provinces,” said Roberts.

He started in Newfoundland, down the St. Lawrence seaway, through northern Ontario last winter and across the Prairies, pushing a shopping cart through 10 provinces with visits to our three territories, while visiting over 400 community and school events.

“One of the reasons I want to champion youth homelessness is it's obviously related to my personal experience,” Roberts said.

In 1989 he was on the streets of Vancouver, chronically homeless and pushing a shopping cart while collecting cans and bottles.

“I made a promise back then that if I ever had a second chance I would do two things; one, I would make the most of the opportunity and two, I would do something to pay it forward.”

Thanks to his mother and a police officer, he was able to get a second chance, received treatment, went back to school and went on to being very successful in the business world, never forgetting the second promise to pay it forward, Roberts said.

He added the key is prevention, combined with emergency services and sustainable housing. The annual cost to keep a single youth in the shelter system is estimated to be between \$30,000-\$40,000. The cost of keeping a single youth in a detention centre is estimated at \$250 a day, or \$100,000 a year.

Canada's total homeless population – estimated by the government to be 150,000 and by non-governmental agencies to be as high as 300,000, costs taxpayers as much as \$7 billion annually.

“If you inspire people first, then you can plant ideas they will more easily grasp onto,” Roberts said. “What I've learned as a speaker, a mentor and a boss is that if you inspire people, they'll follow you.”

Visit, www.thepushforchange.com to learn more about Roberts' journey and the Push For Change campaign.