

Push for Change comes to Chestermere

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Staff Writer

On June 27, Joe Roberts, pushing a shopping cart, walked past the city of Chestermere sign on the North side of the TransCanada Highway.

“We’ve been on the road now for 423 days,” he said.

Roberts has been walking across Canada in all weather and seasons to raise awareness and funds to end youth homelessness in Canada.

He chose to push the shopping cart because it is a symbol of chronic homelessness.

Known as The Push For Change, he started his trek in St. John’s Newfoundland on May 1, 2016.

“It’s been extraordinary,” he said, “seeing the country slowly has been awe inspiring.”

“You get to see all of it,” said Roberts.

From walking through an Ontario winter to watching the spring thaw as he walked through Manitoba and Saskatchewan to his arrival in Alberta at the beginning of summer Roberts has experienced the country in a way that few other Canadians have.

“But as extraordinary as the landscape is, it’s the people that have inspired us the most,” he said.

Just before he arrived in Chestermere an elderly couple stopped on the side of the road to donate \$20 find out what he was doing.

“We’ve had thousands of those exchanges,” he said, “Canadians aren’t short on supporting it.”

The ultimate goal of The Push For Change is to end youth homelessness in Canada.

To do this, Roberts is working to both raise awareness and money.

“We want to invest in a better way of addressing youth homelessness by getting in front of it,” he said.

Roberts’ desire to affect change comes from personal experience.

In 1989 Roberts was homeless.

“I was a typical kid from...Midland Ontario,” he said, “by the time I was 15 I had a lot of conflict at home and I left home.”

Roberts’ said that he wasn’t prepared to live on his own.

“The world kind of chewed me up spit me out,” he said.

By the time he turned 19, Roberts was addicted to drugs and pushing a shopping cart around East Vancouver. He credits his success in turning his life around to the support he had from people, especially his mom, and his access to support systems and services.

Youth homelessness exists in different forms and is present in every community across the country, even in Chestermere asserts Roberts.

“You may not actually see a young person sleeping on the streets in Chestermere but you have all the...root causes that create that youth homelessness,” he said.

“In a community like Chestermere its hidden, its couch surfing, its mental health, its addiction and unfortunately what will happen for a young person in a small community is they won’t hang around here.

“They’ll hitch hike down the road to Calgary, or end up in Vancouver.”

Through The Push For Change and their partners, Roberts wants to solve the problem through prevention and education.

The elimination of youth homelessness is the best way to tackle the problem of homelessness in Canada said



The Push For Change campaign's Joe Roberts passed through Chestermere June 27. Roberts has been pushing his shopping cart across Canada to raise awareness and funds to end youth homelessness. Photo by Jeremy Broadfield

Roberts.

“If we reduce the youth numbers we reduce the adult numbers,” he said.

While they are behind on their financial goal of raising fifty cents for every Canadian, he said that they are meeting their goal to start and continue a conversation about homelessness in Canada.

Roberts attributes these conversations as having an influence on policy makers that can be seen in the 2017 federal budget and the investment of \$11.2 billion in social housing.

“Part of that addresses homelessness and part of that addresses poverty,” he said.

Roberts said that is the largest investment he has seen on this issue in the last 30 years.

This kind of investment is essential to make changes and solve the issue of homelessness.

For more information or to donate go to www.thepushforchange.com.