

Fundraiser crosses Canada on foot

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Joe Roberts in front of the Banff National Park sign at the 7,949 km mark on his 9,000 km journey on foot across Canada to raise funds and awareness for youth homelessness.

A Vancouver man is raising awareness and funds for youth homelessness, one step at a time, as he crosses Canada on foot, pushing a shopping cart.

Joe Roberts reached Banff on Monday at the 7,949 km mark of his 9,220 journey from St. John's, N.L. to Vancouver, B.C.

Monday was Day 435 of what Roberts has estimated will be a 17-month trip.

He said the shopping cart he pushes is a symbol of homelessness.

In 1989, Roberts was homeless. Since then, he's gotten a business degree and turned his life around. This, he said, is his chance to give back.

"My story, and the story of 35,000 young people who experience homelessness every year, is all too similar," he said. "Family conflicts, mental health, addictions, these are things we know and are predictable and we can get in front of them."

Roberts said 100 per cent of the dollars raised go directly to the organizations and efforts he's championing, and that the entirety of his and his team's operating costs are covered by sponsors.

He stressed the importance of truly mobilizing an awareness campaign after his 'practice run' 1,100 km walk from Calgary to Vancouver in 2012 to prepare for this trip garnered little attention.

"I walked from Calgary to Vancouver pretty much unnoticed," he said. "What that taught us was that walking across Canada is cool, but nobody cares unless you have public engagement."

"As of today, we've done over 400 events across the country," he added. "Everything is big as We Day, to small little schools in northern Ontario in the middle of February."

Roberts is typically on the trail at 7 a.m. and walks for about six hours to cover about 24 km. He said that at that pace and walking six days a week, he and his team — of which his wife is the campaign director — estimate the trip would take 17 months, and although they could have done it faster, they would have had to drop events.

"It's a bit exhausting, we've been in activation mode for the past fourteen and a half months," he said.

"We've raised half a million dollars, but more than that, we've raised the volume of the conversation," he said.

As for what he planned to do for his one day off in Banff, Roberts said he'd like to enjoy a nice lunch and avoid hiking.

SVanDyk@postmedia.com