

Man pushing shopping cart across Canada to support homeless youth

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A Canadian entrepreneur who once lived on the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is pushing a shopping cart across the country to raise awareness and funds to end youth homelessness.

"The experience has been extraordinary. Going across Canada on our 150th anniversary as a nation has been fantastic," Joe Roberts, the executive director of The Push for Change, told CTV News during a stop in Abbotsford Monday.

"Probably more important is connecting with the different groups along the way."

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Photos

Joe Roberts (right) is seen pushing his shopping cart in Abbotsford on Monday, Aug. 28, 2017.



The Push for Change’s mission is to “support the end of youth homelessness in Canada.”

Roberts began the 9,000-kilometre trek on May 1, 2016 in St. John’s. He arrived in Abbotsford on Monday, after 485 days on the road. The campaign is set to end on Sept. 29 in downtown Vancouver after making it all the way to Vancouver Island.

According to organization’s [Facebook page](#), the shopping cart symbolizes Roberts’ time as a homeless person and his transformation into the CEO of a successful multimedia design company.

“Personally, I’m connected to this,” he said.

In 1989, Roberts was a self-described “chronic homeless person” and drug addict living on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

“I was pushing a shopping cart, living under the Georgia Street viaduct, but thanks to my mom and a police officer, I got a second chance,” he said.

Roberts went back to school and graduated with honours.

“I went from that young person living on the streets of East Vancouver to being a celebrated Canadian entrepreneur,” he said.

Community partners such as the Fraser Valley’s Cyrus Centre said the tour is sending the right message to homeless youth.

“They need...the understanding that there’s a reason that they’re on the streets,” said Les Talvio, the centre’s executive director. “Every youth has a story and it may not be my story or your story, but it’s their story and they need...empathy from the community.”

Roberts’ long-term goal is to expose the root causes of youth homelessness, adding that the most effective way to help those young people is to support them as early on as possible.

“Getting inside the school systems, find out who those young people who are at risk (are)—whether it’s mental health, whether it’s addictions, whether it’s family conflict—and wrapping the services around them,” he said. “When we begin to understand the core issues that create youth homelessness and adult homelessness, we can begin to rally around what this really is, a health care issue, and provide the support and the systems so that people don’t fall through the cracks.”

In the meantime, Roberts said he hopes to keep inspiring youth to overcome difficulty and lead successful lives.

“Having an impact on young people who are facing challenges and really speaking to their possibilities—that it was in me to succeed and it’s in them to succeed,” he said.