

Vancouver man pushes shopping cart across Canada to end youth homelessness

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Every morning, Joe Roberts and his team get up at 5:30 a.m. Then, Roberts grabs his shopping cart and starts pushing.

He's been pushing it 24 kilometres a day for almost 17 months — more than 9,000 kilometres.

"To put that into perspective for anyone with a pedometer out there, by the 29th of September, I'll have walked 11,375,000 steps," Roberts said.

Roberts has been pushing his specially modified shopping cart across Canada in a bid to fight youth homelessness as part of a campaign called [The Push for Change](#). After setting out from St. John's, Nfld., in May of 2016, he's finally set to return home to Vancouver.

A personal cause

Fifty-year-old Roberts picked the shopping cart as a visual symbol for homelessness — and he has a very personal reason for taking on this particular cause.

"In 1989, I was one of those people you'd see pushing a shopping cart around the Downtown Eastside, chronically homeless. I lived under the Georgia Street viaduct," he said.

"I was a good kid that came from a good mom. The system just broke down around my life at 15."

Roberts says the main way to fight youth homelessness is to prevent it before it happens by providing more support for young people dealing with issues like mental health, addiction and abuse.

While in Ottawa, Roberts had a chance to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He's cautiously optimistic about

the federal government's approach to the issue, such as an \$11.2-million investment in social housing in its most recent budget.

"It's not as complicated or as complex as we think," he said. "It's really about an investment in prevention and looking at ways to provide young people an exit out of street involvement."

A journey to remember

Although youth homelessness in Canada is a massive issue, Roberts is confident it can be overcome.

"I've seen everything you can imagine, walking 9,000 kilometres across the country but what makes Canada beautiful is our values," he said.

"We are a country that rolls up its sleeves and tackles social issues. You don't have to convince Canadians to get involved and help — you just have to give them an opportunity.

Roberts will be arriving in Vancouver and officially ending his journey with a "grand finale" event downtown on Sept. 29.

With files from CBC Radio One's [The Early Edition](#).