

VIDEO: Homeless advocate walks through Mission during cross-Canada trek

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It's been a long journey for Joe Roberts, but he can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

On Tuesday, Roberts walked through downtown Mission and along the Lougheed Highway towards Maple Ridge, pushing a shopping cart as part of his Push for Change campaign.

The Ontario native is on a 9,000-kilometre, 517-day trek across Canada to raise awareness and funds for ending youth homelessness.

Tuesday was day 486 of the event that has seen Roberts walk 8,733 km so far. He has just 339 km to go to complete his quest.

He said the reception he has received across Canada has been "fantastic" and Mission is no exception.

"We had a beautiful reception out at Dewdney General Store this morning. The mayor was there and the RCMP inspector. We've had great support as we walked though the city of Mission," said Roberts.

His route took him along Highway 7, through Mission's downtown core and out towards Maple Ridge.

His campaign's slogan is "Striving to End Youth Homelessness One Step at a Time!" and it's a subject Roberts knows well.

In 1989, Roberts was homeless and found himself living under a bridge. Unlike many people in this situation, he managed to turn his life around. Roberts is now an advocate, author and executive director of Push for Change. He is committed to helping young people break through their most difficult barriers.

"I realized that for years I thought my homeless experience was something to be ashamed off. It was behind me and there was no need to bring it up.

"When I finally did start sharing my story in a transparent way, I realized it was the biggest asset I had to bringing change."

He said the best thing about lived experience is it gives you access to the way people think.

"My experience is powerful."

In order to maintain a consistent pace, Roberts walk a minimum of 24-kilometres a day, but, he doesn't walk every day. He needs a rest every now and then, but usually spends his non-walking days talking to local groups about his cause.

So far, his campaign has raised about \$530,000, but the money isn't as important as the message.

He has visited with more than 100,000 young people in schools across the country.

"In a world where there is so many bad examples for young people, to go into an elementary school or a high school and to get young people pumped up and excited about social justice and then see them empower themselves by getting involved, that's been absolutely massive."

Still, long days on the road have begun to take its toll.

"I've got to be honest. After 16 months of this, and one month to go, I'll be glad when this is over."

For more on the campaign, visit thepushforchange.com.