

Youth homeless champion pushes his way into Nanaimo

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By [Ian Holmes](#)

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Joe Roberts has made hundreds of community appearances during his outreach campaign across Canada.thepushforchange.com

NANAIMO — A man pushing a shopping cart across the country brings his crusade to address youth homelessness in Canada to the harbour city.

Joe Roberts, 50, has been on the road since the spring of 2016 raising money and awareness for the estimated 35,000 Canadian youth living on the streets.

His 9,100 km mission, [The Push For Change](#), to prevent homelessness in the first place is poised to wrap-up at the end of September.

“When you see a young person on the street I always ask the question – what happened before that happened? Statistically we know what happened, it was early childhood trauma, it was not being able to get along at home, it was addiction, mental health,” Roberts told *NanaimoNewsNOW*.

“These are core issues we can get at and support before that person becomes homeless.”

Roberts said he suffered early childhood abuse, turned to drugs as a young teen and then left home at 15. He

laboured through various stages of homelessness, including several years as a drug addict living on the notorious streets of Vancouver's downtown eastside.

That's where his mother and a police officer rescued Roberts in 1989.

He got clean, went to business school and 12 years later is a successful entrepreneur.

He said his turnaround started with stable housing. He stressed shelter is key in preventing the challenging chronically homeless state, a place where “so much more work” is required to help someone get on the right track in life.

Roberts is meeting with City Council and representatives from various grassroots organizations, including the City's Affordable Housing Strategy Steering Committee on Monday.

In April, Nanaimo City Council voted in favour of forming an [affordable housing strategy](#).

ian@nanaimonewsnow.com

On Twitter: [@reporterholmes](#)

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