

Youth homelessness advocate Joe Roberts to complete cross-country trek with finale event in Vancouver

 [straight.com/news/959991/youth-homelessness-advocate-joe-roberts-complete-cross-country-trek-finale-event](https://www.straight.com/news/959991/youth-homelessness-advocate-joe-roberts-complete-cross-country-trek-finale-event)

9/9/2017



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- The Push for Change cofounder Joe Roberts, pictured here with his wife, Marie Roberts, has trekked over 9,000 kilometres across Canada in an effort to raise awareness about youth homelessness. The Push for Change

For the past 16 months, Joe Roberts has been pushing a shopping cart across Canada. For the majority of his 9,000-kilometre-plus journey, the carrier has remained empty—save for a small bag where the entrepreneur keeps pins and buttons that have been gifted to him along the way—but the meaning of the metal cart weighs heavy.

“It’s sort of that unfortunate symbol of chronic homelessness that we see in Vancouver and neighbouring communities,” Roberts tells the *Straight* by phone from a pitstop in Abbotsford. “And it’s a nod to my story in living under the Georgia Viaduct in 1989.”

A former addict turned businessman who lived on the streets of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside during his teen years, Roberts is now the cofounder of [the Push for Change](#), a Canadian nonprofit that aims to raise awareness about youth homelessness while collecting money to help combat the issue.

He embarked on a cross-country tour from St. John's, Newfoundland, in May of 2016 with the goal of arriving on the West Coast—shopping cart in hand—this fall. Along the way, he's conquered rain, sun, and snow, and engaged with countless communities and kids at over 500 schools and events in cities such as Halifax, Montréal, and Whitehorse.

"I really wanted to do something to pay it forward, to give back to a country that's given me so much," Roberts explains. "And, also, to really open folks' eyes through telling the stories of those experiences, how easy youth homelessness can happen."

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Former homeless addict turned entrepreneur Joe Roberts has braved snow and rain in his 17-month-long cross-country journey.
The Push for Change

On September 29, Roberts and his team will end their 17-month-long journey in Vancouver, where the homelessness advocate will complete the last few kilometres of his journey before sharing his experience at a finale event at the Vancouver Public Library's central branch (350 West Georgia Street).

Prior to that, Roberts will speak at [Art Rapture](#), a curated art exhibition taking place on September 22 and 23 at 130 West 4th Avenue. One hundred percent of proceeds from a live auction conducted during the function will benefit local and national initiatives that help fight youth homelessness.

In total, Roberts has raised \$540,000 on his Push for Change walk so far. "That's significant because fundraising wasn't really the biggest part of our campaign," he says. "Really, it was about increasing awareness and community engagement."

On the day of the grand finale, Vancouverites are welcome to walk nine kilometres, three-and-a-half kilometres, or one kilometre alongside Roberts beginning at Confederation Park (250 Willingdon Avenue, Burnaby), No Frills (1460 East Hastings Street), or Victory Square (200 West Hastings Street), respectively. Together, the group will make the trek to the Central Library, where a celebration awaits.

Made possible by [Family Services of Greater Vancouver](#), the concluding event will feature speeches and entertainment, plus free T-shirts for the first 1,000 guests. Admission is free. Those interested in attending the event, or joining Roberts for a portion of the walk, should RSVP [online](#).

Although he'll have walked nearly 10,000 kilometres by then, for Roberts, the last few may just be the most meaningful. "Walking down East Hastings Street, the community I escaped 25 years ago," he says, "I know, for me, there's going to be a lot of emotion when I finish that last couple of kilometres."

The Push for Change Grand Finale takes place on September 29, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Vancouver Public Library's central branch. For more information about the event, or to RSVP for a part of the walk, click [here](#).