

Push for Change making its way to Barrie

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The Push for Change



Bryon Johnson/Metroland

Joe Roberts, executive director of The Push for Change movement, speaks at a rally held at Garden Square in Brampton during a stop in that city. The Barrie man is in the midst of pushing a grocery cart across Canada and will hold a rally in Barrie Dec. 27.

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Barrie Advance

By [Janis Ramsay](#)

As Joe Roberts makes the rounds in Ontario, he's no longer seen as just a guy pushing a shopping cart.

In Guelph earlier this week, Roberts was constantly interrupted with car honks and donation offers while on the road for his Push for Change campaign.



The Barrie man started his cross-Canada challenge in May.

"It's been weird. In the last few months, since we got to the other side of Toronto, we've gained attention," Roberts said before making his way into a school to share his goal with young children.

"I get stopped all the time now. It's difficult to even take a pee break."

Roberts is walking 24 kilometres a day across the country to raise awareness and funds for youth homelessness.

The trip is 9,000 kilometres from one end of Canada to the other, with a goal to raise \$17 million — 50 cents for every Canadian.

So far, he's raised just over \$300,000, including big donations from celebrities such as Wayne Gretzky and Mike (Pinball) Clemons.

"Last night, we got a shout-out from Don Cherry," Roberts said Tuesday morning.

He said smaller communities have rallied around his cause.

"When I went to Cambridge, they bused in five different schools and I spoke with 1,800 kids," Roberts said. "This is something I want kids to be exposed to."

As a teenager, Roberts left home and moved to Barrie in an attempt to continue high school.

But he became a drug addict and ended up dropping out, later finding himself living on the street.

In less than a week, he'll be returning to Barrie.

"There'll be a bunch of different feelings. I've gone full-circle. I left Barrie a screwed-up kid and I'm coming back

there as a man with a mission,” he said. “It’s the town where I’ve made mistakes, now I’m making headway. It’s the town where I first used drugs, but also where Laurentian University gave me an honorary doctorate.”

During the conversation with The Advance, one man tried to pass Roberts a coffee, while another had a donation to give.

A few more honked, including a busload of schoolchildren passing him as he was on the way to a school to speak with them.

“I would think people would be mad because I’m making them late for work,” Roberts said. “I just turned 50 and I remember when I first said I’d be walking across Canada, people snickered behind my back.”

Now, he feels people are starting to pay attention.

“I’m speaking in schools where we’ve got the superintendents and director of education there. There’s potential to educate kids and continue to work within school systems. It used to be, ‘Hey, there’s a guy with a shopping cart’. That’s gone. Once I get to Barrie and head north, I think it’s only going to get bigger.”

While Roberts said he usually gets the spotlight, he thanks his support team for all of their work, which includes his wife Marie, the OPP and Barrie businesses Sports Medicine and Mario Designs.

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