

Formerly homeless man pushing shopping cart across Sask. to raise awareness



By David Baxter
Reporter Global News



Joe Roberts pushes his shopping cart along Highway 1 near Moosomin, Sask. with an RCMP escort.

Supplied/The Push for Change

In the late 80's and early 90's a shopping cart was a way for Joe Roberts to collect cans to bring in for a recycling refund. This was when he was living under a bridge on Vancouver's eastside.

Now, it's a way for him to raise awareness and start discussions about ways to help people like himself get off the streets.

Roberts pushed his shopping cart into Saskatchewan on May 8 when he reached Moosomin. It was day 373 of his walking journey along the Trans-Canada Highway.

Along the way, Roberts is stopping in communities along Highway 1 and visiting schools to talk about youth homelessness.

"It's important that we open up and talk about what youth homelessness is and isn't and what the root causes are," Roberts said.

"Because the youth at risk exist in every small community across this country."

This was the case for Roberts. Growing up in Barrie, Ontario a combination of childhood trauma, problems at home, plus drug and alcohol issues led him to leave home at the age of 15.

"The interesting thing about a community like Whitewood or Moosomin, or some of the other small places that we've been to is that youth homelessness or youth at risk is somewhat invisible, and that's what makes it insidious and somewhat difficult to wrap our heads around," Roberts said.

Roberts added that understanding the root causes, such as mental health, trauma, problems at home and addiction, is when greater moves can be made toward prevention.



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Joe Roberts hold a presentation at General Amherst High School in Amherstburg, Ont.

Supplied/The Push for Change

For those already couch surfing or living on the streets, Roberts said programs need to exist that will help them get out of the cycle of using emergency services.

“We need to create Housing First strategies for young people. We need to create models so they’re only in that emergency crisis five to 15 days, and give them the opportunity to move up and move forward,” he said.

This was the case for Roberts. He was helped by his mom and a police officer, Scott McCloud, who got him into drug treatment. He eventually went to school, started a multimedia company, and founded The Push for Change, his current journey.

“I’m an example of a community investment gone correct.”

Roberts has partnered with the RCMP and Ontario Provincial Police extensively on his journey. While in Saskatchewan, he will be speaking to cadets at the RCMP Depot about how law enforcement can play an important role in helping young people get out of a cycle of chronic homelessness.

He will also be speaking at a regimental dinner while in Regina.

Roberts will be travelling through Saskatchewan until June 12. Along the way he will be stopping in in 28 communities.

Roberts is scheduled to be in Regina on May 22, where he will also work with Street Culture Kidz, a local outreach agency for at-risk youth.

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Joe Roberts poses in a field near Moosomin, Sask.

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