

# Man pushing shopping cart to end youth homelessness stops in Saint John

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## Joe Roberts of Push for Change campaign says hidden youth homelessness an insidious problem in Canada

David Bartlett · CBC News · Posted: Aug 03, 2016 1:21 PM AT | Last Updated: August 3, 2016

Man pushing shopping cart to end youth homelessness stops in Saint John as part of cross-Canada trek. 0:26

The Push for Change campaign, raising awareness about hidden youth homelessness in Canada, stopped in Saint John on Wednesday, in the midst of 9,000-kilometre trek across Canada.

Joe Roberts, who describes himself as the former CEO of a major multimedia company, is the man pushing a shopping cart from Newfoundland to British Columbia.

“ What's in the shopping cart is hope. ” - Joe Roberts, *Push for Change*

Roberts knows what it's like to be young and homeless. He says at the age 15 he lived on the streets of Vancouver's notorious downtown eastside.

Like 67 per cent of youth who wind up on the streets, he said his struggles began with conflict at home.

"My father died young and my step-father was an abusive alcoholic," he said.

"So at the age of 15, home just wasn't a good place and I had to leave."

In the beginning, he said, his homelessness was really just unstable housing, while he surfed from couch to couch.

"It's that insidious, hidden homelessness. It's the kind of homelessness that you have in Saint John, and in Fredericton and in Moncton," Roberts said.

Information Morning - Saint John

From homeless teen to tech CEO

Joe Roberts is pushing a cart across Canada to fight homelessness. 10:04

## Safe Harbour closed

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Saint John is an important stop on the campaign, Roberts said, because earlier this year, the Safe Harbour youth shelter in the city was forced to close its doors due to lack of funding.

"It was really sad to see the shelter close down this January, but I'm encouraged by the news that I'm getting now, that both the board of directors and the government are now sitting around talking about what [they] need to do to get it opened and get it funded," said Roberts.

Roberts says what helped him turn his life around is what needs to be in place for all kids who find themselves on the streets in Canada.

"I had a mom that wouldn't quit on me. I had that one champion," he said.

"And I had a police officer that played a major role in my life and helped me find the door of transformation."

## Day 94

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Roberts says his days on this trek start early at about 5:30 a.m., trying to push the "symbol of homelessness" about 24 kilometres.

"And so far we're at Day 94 and I've walked 1,895 kilometres," he told *Information Morning Saint John*.

"The engagement, and people that we're talking to, and the conversations we're having about what we need to do to support the prevention, reduction and the end of youth homelessness are good ones."

He said it's crucial to meet young people where they are, and give them the resources they need, to get off the streets and show them their self worth.

"What's in the shopping cart is hope — what's in the shopping cart is transformation, what's in the shopping cart is a brighter future."

The Push for Change campaign stops in Fredericton on Thursday and Friday for a number of events.