

## From skid row to a CEO

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If you saw Joe Roberts at the height of his crack and heroin addiction, he would have looked like any typical character floundering in the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

"I lived outside, I had a scruffy beard and bloodshot eyes, matted hair and yellow teeth. I was probably one of those people ... you would have avoided," says Roberts.

A far cry from the 43-year-old clean-cut CEO who now lives with his wife and family in Coquitlam.



**Skid row CEO: Joe Roberts has experienced the depths of despair and not only pulled himself out of homelessness and addiction, but completely turned his life around. He's speaking to the Burnaby Board of Trade on March 25.**

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The first time Roberts got high, he was just nine years old. By 15, he was living on the streets; at 16, he was in adult prison. Shortly after, he started using needles, shooting speed and coke, which eventually led to heroin.

"There was sort of a hole in me from a very young age, a feeling that I was less-than, and I was really looking for something that would make me feel good outside of myself," he says.

Roberts recalls a couple of low points from his life as an addict.

Once, he sold the boots off his feet in a bar on East Hastings in the dead of winter. At another point, he was drunk at a party pointing a 9 mm pistol at his temple.

"I was suicidal, I had reached the bottom, and I didn't think I could get sober," he says.

His behaviour was alarming enough for police to surround the house. Roberts landed in a psychiatric ward, and, after that, he got into detox and began the road to recovery.

He also went back to school to study business marketing and sales, was top of his class and graduated with honours.

"I was a one-hit wonder," Roberts says on how he got clean and stayed clean.

He is now CEO of Mindware Internet Solutions, an Internet marketing campaign management company.

He also works as a motivational speaker and has talked to thousands of people across North America about his "skid row to CEO" experience. He has won an Ontario premier's award for business achievement and a Courage to Come Back award for people who have overcome illness, injury or adversity.

"Adversity is part of the human condition," he says. "Everyone goes through adversity, challenge and change."

Roberts' story will be part of an upcoming Burnaby Board of Trade breakfast event on March 25.

"We're going to be addressing homelessness, the softer side of it, because there are concerns from businesses in the Burnaby area," Roberts says. "I'm just going to put a face to the cause."

Roberts says he can speak on homelessness from two points of view: what it's like for businesses and what it's like on the streets. And despite his experience, he says he's not a "bleeding heart liberal."

"I'm quite conservative," he says, adding he's worked hard to get where he is today. "I was a burden on society's taxes."

Roberts' talk is part of the Burnaby Board of Trade's distinguished speaker breakfast series. The presentation will focus on how homelessness and poverty affects the business community, while looking at solutions and alternatives, among other things.

The talk is Thursday, March 25, from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. at the Executive Hotel, 4201 Lougheed Hwy. Tickets are \$30 for board of trade members; \$40 for everyone else - GST not included. To register, call 604-412-0100 or e-mail [admin@bbot.ca](mailto:admin@bbot.ca).

For more on Roberts, visit his website at [www.skidrowceo.com](http://www.skidrowceo.com)