

# Orillia-area groups join push for change

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## Orillia-area groups join 'Push For Change'

Frank Matys

*The Orillia and Area Push For Change Committee gathered outside the opera house Monday in anticipation of an upcoming visit by Joe Roberts, who is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to raise awareness of youth homelessness. Pictured are Catherine Holtz, Jane Dunlop, Josh Barath, Acting OPP Sgt. Heather Harmer, Coun. Pat Hehn, and Kevin Gangloff.*

Orillia Today

By [Frank Matys](#)



One man's cross-country campaign to end youth homelessness is generating a flurry of local initiatives in advance of his appearance here.

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Inspiring those efforts is Joe Roberts, a former homeless youth and heroin addict who kicked drugs and worked his way to the top of a multi-media company.

Roberts is now pushing a shopping cart across Canada and making stops along the way to speak about the struggles he faced as a homeless youth.

His 'Push For Change' tour arrives in Orillia Jan. 1.

According to Catherine Holtz, a member of Orillia's youth opportunities committee, Roberts's visit is particularly meaningful as her group investigates options for a shelter serving the city's younger residents.

"These are our youth, they are our kids and they need the help and support of the community," Holtz said this week.

Roberts will speak at the Orillia Opera House during a New Year's Day levee, and at the community centre in Coldwater the following day.

Organizing the event is the Orillia and Area Push For Change Committee, a collaborative partnership involving multiple organizations that include the youth centre, the OPP, the city, Severn Township, Georgian College, and Lakehead University.

In a lead-in to Roberts’s visit, the local committee has planned 15 events to generate discussion of the issue while raising support – and funds – for the national initiative.

The visit “provides a focus for all community stakeholders who have an interest in youth homelessness and its impact in our communities,” said Kevin Gangloff, committee chair.

“Joe Roberts has inspired us to raise awareness of this important cause,” he added.

According to Holtz, 27 per cent of the more than 1,800 youth surveyed locally had experienced some form of homelessness in the past two years.

“Which is an enormous amount, when you consider that it’s not just numbers – that these are kids, they are in school, they are facing actual problems and they actually have nowhere to go,” she said.

The Lighthouse Soup Kitchen and Shelter on Peter Street South provides beds for youth 16 and older due to an absence of other shelters locally, said executive director Linda Goodall.

“We’ve had a 16 year old and an 83 year old at the same time, and everything in between,” she said.

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