

OPP join the Push for Change

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The Push for Change

Special to This Week

Joe Roberts has embarked on a cross-Canada trek with a shopping cart to bring awareness to the issue of youth homelessness in the country with the Push for Change. Although his route does not take him directly through Kawartha Lakes, local OPP have organized an event September 13 and 14, that the public is welcome to participate in.

KAWARTHA LAKES - OPP officers in Kawartha Lakes and beyond are letting their feet do the talking as they embark on a two-day, 80 km journey from Lindsay to Orillia to raise awareness about youth homelessness in Canada.



The issue is one of particular importance to Kawartha Lakes Constable Aron Lea-Stoddart, who is taking leadership role in the event on a local level, because her mother Taylore Hald was homeless when she was a young person.

The inaugural Push for Change campaign is the brainchild of Joe Roberts who will push a shopping cart 9,000 km across the country, stopping along the way to talk about the root causes of homelessness. Though he is now the executive director of Push for Change and a celebrated Canadian entrepreneur, Mr. Roberts used to be one of the homeless youths he now works to help, and could often be seen pushing a shopping cart around Vancouver's notorious Downtown East side. When he was a heroin addict, Mr. Roberts once sold his shoes for \$10 to pay for drugs, leading to his decision to come home to Ontario and try to turn his life around. Getting clean was not easy, however, and Mr. Roberts' struggle came to a head one dark night when he threatened to end his life with a gun. That's where Retired OPP Constable Scott MacLeod came in. The officer, recognizing a man in crisis rather than a threat, helped Mr. Roberts get the help he needed.

From there, Mr. Roberts graduated college on the dean's list and went on to be a successful CEO.

In honour of the Push for Change journey, that unfortunately does not directly go through Kawartha Lakes, local OPP are organizing a walk, sleep out and bike on Sept. 13 and 14 to contribute to the cause.

Participants will gather at the Kawartha Lakes OPP detachment on Highway 35 in Lindsay around 8 a.m. to register, warm-up and enjoy opening ceremonies before setting off at 9 a.m. The first leg of the walk will conclude about 10 km down the road at the Cambray/Fenelon Township Centre before continuing on to the 40 km mark at the Kirkfield Liftlock where those who choose to do so will either tent or camp out under the stars in an attempt to better understand the plight of homeless youth. The following day, participants will bike the remainder of the route to OPP headquarters in Orillia where a community barbecue will be held. Participants are encouraged to join participating officers for any portion or all of the 80 km route. The cost of taking part in the two-day experience is \$100 and includes a T-shirt, snacks, transportation and logistic support whereas to participate for one or part-day it is \$50 and includes a T-shirt, water, meal and logistic support. The cost of participation in the sleep out is \$50 and includes a T-shirt and logistical support. Sponsors can also donate \$25 and will get a T-shirt. Charitable Tax Donations will also be provided upon request.

Money raised by the Push for Change campaign will go to the Upstream Project which plans to work strategically in communities to shift the focus of teen homelessness to prevention through school initiatives.

“Every homeless youth has been to school at some point, so that is where they need to start,” adds Const. Lea-Stoddart.

“They are trying to shift the focus on preventing it before it starts instead of trying to fix it after it happens.”

Const. Hildenbrand adds that, from a policing perspective, the better established relationships there are with at risk young people, the better chance of catching red flags and helping them before they become homeless.

“You don’t know what happens behind closed doors, but we get to see behind those doors,” adds Const. Lea-Stoddart, adding that not all homeless youth are visible on a street corner.

The Kawartha Lakes OPP detachment has already gotten the fundraising ball rolling with community donations and a silent auction that raised about \$1,000 for the cause.

For more information, to volunteer or otherwise participate, contact Taylor.Hald@opp.ca or Aron.Lea-Stoddart@opp.ca or visit thepushforchange.com.