

Barrie's Joe Roberts makes his way through Ontario

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The Push for Change

Submitted photo

Barrie's Joe Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across the Canada to raise awareness of — and funds to prevent — youth homelessness.

Barrie Advance
By [Janis Ramsay](#)

Push for Change organizer Joe Roberts predicted Ontario would be a game-changer for his cause.

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He was right.

Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to bring awareness to youth homelessness and was greeted by Walter Gretzky and OPP Commissioner Vince Hawkes as he crossed into Ontario from Quebec in September.

“Wayne Gretzky’s Foundation made a \$10,000 donation and the OPPA made a \$6,000 donation, so we’ve got really great supports,” Roberts said.

The donations are adding up as each town he walks through gets on board with the campaign.

“We are raising national awareness on the issue of youth homelessness and each community we go through, we have another extraordinary event,” Roberts said.

The Barrie native started his journey in Newfoundland in May and is getting close to the half-way mark as he travels 9,000 kilometres from one end of Canada to the other.

His goal is to raise \$17 million — 50 cents for every Canadian — and Roberts is well on his way.

This week (Nov. 7-11), he is heading to Welland, Cayuga and Windsor and aims to arrive in Barrie on Dec. 27, in time for a Barrie-Huron Rotary Club event.

After six months literally on the road, Roberts said his body is holding up well.

“The pressure and stress of the engagements wears us thin,” he said, referring to his wife, Marie, who is at his side during the campaign. “I go out and I walk 24 km a day, but now that we’re in Ontario, we have so many more logistics. We didn’t have to do that in Atlantic Canada. We just got up and walked.”

The OPP is helping him here in Ontario.

“It has been a great relationship,” OPP Sgt. Kerry Schmidt said. “We’re inspired by his determination and his plan to raise this awareness about youth homelessness. It’s something we deal with all of the time.”

Youth homelessness is often a result of family breakdown, drug addition or mental health issue, Schmidt added.

“We get called often as a last resort.”

He said officers are working with Roberts to ensure resources are put in place to prevent crime and prevent teens from ending up on the street, he said.

Janis Ramsay is a reporter at the Barrie Advance. You can reach her at jramsay@simcoe.com . Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Simcoe.com on Facebook](#)

The Rotary Club of Barrie-Huron is hosting a casual luncheon with Roberts Tuesday, Dec. 27. Tickets are \$25 with proceeds to Push for Change and local Upstream projects. For tickets, call John Imrie at 705-727-2199.

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