

Bracebridge police brave chilly temperatures for homelessness awareness

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Push for change

Mary Beth Hartill

Const. Dave Hallett and Aux. const. Tammy Whitehead slept outside the OPP detachment in Bracebridge to bring awareness to homelessness as the OPP partner with Push For Change.

BRACEBRIDGE – Under an awning, with only found items and a couple of sleeping bags to keep them warm, Const. Dave Hallett and Aux. Const. Tammy Whitehead braved the chill of a damp night.



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The pair were taking part in the [Sleep Out Challenge](#) on Nov. 25 as part of a joint initiative between the OPP and the Push for Change campaign to bring awareness to the issue of homelessness.

“The evening went well,” said Hallett. “Despite frosty temperatures, our meagre setup worked well.”

Their set up included an awning providing cover overhead but no shelter from the elements on the sides. They also had sleeping bags and beds comprised of found pallets and pieces of foam board.

The Push For Change campaign involves Joe Roberts, a former homeless addict and now successful businessman, pushing a shopping cart across the country to raise awareness and funds to help put an end to youth homelessness in Canada.

Because the initiative is a national one Hallett and Whitehead encouraged people to not only donate via the website but to donate to local food banks and, although they were set up to take donations the night of the sleep out, it is something they encourage people to do regularly. Hallett said many people dropped by to donate to the food banks, and they raised more than \$600 in cash and online donations to assist with the campaign.

“The donations and awareness will go a long way to bring an end to youth homelessness and the Push For Change campaign in general,” he said. “We certainly had a brief glimpse into what an evening behind homeless was like but in the end we knew in the morning we could go home to our families while many others wouldn’t.”

Hallett said the reality is there is homelessness in Muskoka, but it is more hidden than people sleeping on city streets. There are families sleeping in cars or couch surfing at friends’ houses.

Although often the homelessness situation in Muskoka goes hidden, he’s seen it in the 10 years he’s been working for the OPP in Bracebridge.

“I’ll go into a house and obviously it’s a flophouse because it’s an abandoned building,” he said.

He said being homeless is not necessarily sleeping on the streets. It's not sleeping in your own bed or not having a bed to sleep in.

"It's definitely not a stranger to Muskoka," he said.

He said help comes with knowledge and although Muskoka has resources the problem is getting the people to the resources.

He said it is that connect that tends to break down in the system.

There isn't an easy solution to closing that disconnect between resources and the people needing the help. But Hallett said once the gap closes and people who need help start getting it, others will follow. However, there is also the push for those needing the help to ask for it.

"To say 'I need help' is a big step for anybody."