

# Police board backs national campaign

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Joe Roberts began The Push for Change to fight youth homelessness in Canada in Newfoundland. (Postmedia Network File Photo)

A decision by Sault Ste. Marie Police Services Board to support a national homelessness campaign doesn't mean the coffers will automatically open for other individuals making their way across Canada to support different causes, officials say.

The board agreed with a recommendation by Chief Robert Keetch to donate \$500 to The Push for Change. Joe Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to help fight youth homelessness. He is expected to be in the Sault in early February. His visit will include stops at city schools, Keetch told the board during a meeting on Thursday.

The board's account, funded by sources such as auctions and proceeds of crime revenue, has backed charities and events happening in Sault Ste. Marie such as Easter Seals Telethon and police-related activities such as a scholarship fund and golf tournament in memory of Donald Doucet. He's the first city police officer to be killed while on duty. Contributions are usually for \$500.

Keetch is backing The Push for Change for several reasons including Ontario Provincial Police's support of Roberts. An OPP officer stopped Roberts from taking his life when he was 15.

"This is one of their significant campaigns that they're getting behind as an organization to support and raise funds for as well," said Keetch during the meeting.

Youth homelessness and drug use are "prevalent in our community," he told reporters. City police, he added, will be involved in programs funded by The Push for Change.

"This sounds worthwhile to me," Ward 3 councillor Pat Mick told Keetch. "I just caution that we because we do it once that somebody doesn't say at another meeting next year, or a few months from now, we've set a precedent. We must do this."

Cash in the board fund, established in 1987, is designated for rewards for major crimes, special investigative services, fitness-related projects, community appreciation and public relations and unanticipated funding for board requirements, said Mick in a followup email.

"My concern is to maintain this fund for local causes and not perceived as money to be used to replace budget shortfalls," she said.

Chair John Bruno told The Sault Star each appeal will be considered on its own.

"If we get requests from other charities we would look at each request individually and on their own merit and the board would decide," he said.

OPP support of Roberts "was one of the issues" that prompted the board to back Keetch's request for The Push for Change, said Bruno.

Roberts began his trek in Newfoundland on May 1. His 9,000-kilometre journey is scheduled to end Sept. 30 in Vancouver.

Walkers and bicyclists crossing Canada regularly pass through the Sault each year. Causes promoted include palliative care, AIDS research, Canadian Mental Health Association, Mood Disorders Society of Canada and fighting malaria.

Jason McComb encouraged Sault residents to help soup kitchens and shelters when he stopped in the city in July 2015.

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