

# The Push for Change supported by OPP

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## Joe Roberts walked into Parry Sound with regional, local police at his side

### Heading into town

Sarah Bissonette/Metroland

*Joe Roberts, left, walking with Northeast Region Chief Superintendent Fern Labelle, centre, and Superintendent, Director of Support Northeast Region, Jim Szarka right, along Oasler Lake Road at 11 a.m. on Jan. 11 on their way into Parry Sound. At 3 p.m. Roberts will be at the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board Building at 1 Beechwood Drive. The public is invited to attend the speech. Roberts is walking accross the country raising awareness about youth homeless .*



Parry Sound North Star  
By [Sarah Bissonette](#)

PARRY SOUND – [Joe Roberts walked into Parry Sound Wednesday](#) with members of the OPP and Anishinabek Police at his side from James Bay Junction Road.

The distance to the Parry Sound OPP station was just five kilometers of the 9,000 he'll cover through Ontario in his cross-country campaign The Push for Change. The Push for Change is raising awareness about youth homelessness in an effort to be the impetus for the cultural shift that ends it.

It's a cause close to Roberts' heart. As a young adult he found himself addicted to heroin and living on the streets of Vancouver far from the small Ontario town of his childhood. He credits his transformation to a successful businessman to his mother and the OPP officer who answered the call when he was suicidal and who became a close family friend.

The [OPP has added its voice to The Push for Change](#) and are either organizing or supporting community awareness and fundraising events in support of The Push for Change. Officers in each community are also on the road with Roberts for safety.

"I'm very proud to walk with you today (as we) Push for Change," said Roberts to the officers gathered around him just before heading off for town.

Those at Roberts' side included OPP Northeast Region Chief Superintendent Fern Labelle and Northeast Region Director of Support Superintendent Jim Szarka, Push for Change Northeast Regional Coordinator Baldassare Nuccio, plus West Parry Sound OPP Detachment Commander Mike Gordon. Parry Sound is the first community in the region Roberts passed through.

“Really, it’s all about the cause, we’re trying to raise the awareness about youth homeless and bring that attention to that cause. It’s a community event, it’s community awareness, it’s community well being and is part of our organization’s mobilization efforts as well to bring that kind of awareness to our communities and try to make a healthier environment to our communities, youth homelessness fits right in there,” said Labelle.

Supporting an end to youth homelessness by changing the way society thinks of it also aides in the efforts crime prevention.

“If someone is homeless they may not be able to make the proper choices in what they would like in their own life – their education, to sustain themselves – I think if we can address it at the bottom line level, give them that assistance – especially the youth – then maybe that will make a difference later on in the choices they make,” said Labelle.

On Wednesday afternoon, Roberts spoke about his life at the District Social Services Administration Board office, highlighting that everyone is full of potential if they are have the confidence and support to tap into it. Community social organization staff and community leaders were in attendance.

“I am here today because of a community investment gone right,” he said.

Roberts left the coast of Newfoundland on May 1, 2016 and is on path to reach the coast of British Columbia on Sept. 20.

From Parry Sound Roberts and his two-person support team picked up the walk just outside of North Bay.

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