


The Push For Change Comes To Orillia

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Joe Roberts will bring The Push for Change campaign to raise awareness about youth homelessness to Orillia on New Year's Day.

Roberts, who was raised in Simcoe County, is pushing a shopping cart 9,000 kilometres across Canada.

He will join Mayor Steve Clarke's levee at the Orillia Opera House from 1 until 4 p.m. on Sunday.

Later in the day, he will have a private dinner with young people from the Orillia Youth Centre.



Roberts left home at age 15 due to family conflict, dropped out of school a year later, and by the time he was 19, he was on the streets of Vancouver, addicted to drugs.

Roberts eventually made his way back to Simcoe County, entered treatment and is now a successful businessman.

He says there are disengaged young people in every corner and in every hamlet of this country.

As for the root causes of youth homelessness, Roberts singles out mental health, addiction, family conflict and early childhood trauma.

Whether it is Orillia, Barrie or Midland, when a young person ends up leaving home, Roberts says they might end up couch surfing or staying in a place that is really unsafe.

He says just because we don't see young people sitting in a piece of cardboard in front of the liquor store doesn't mean there isn't homeless youth in the community.

While Roberts admits there is no quick fix to youth homelessness, he says there are three pillars government's must invest in.

Those are frontline service providers, reaching out to youth in high school and looking at housing first initiatives that are youth focused.

Roberts says homelessness is not a complex issue

He says putting a rover on Mars is complex, but building houses and safety measures for children is simple, there just needs to be the political will to do so.

Right now, the only place in Simcoe County with shelter beds for homeless youth is at Youth Haven in Barrie, and the 25 beds are usually full.

50 per cent of all the money Roberts raises during his visits to cities and towns stays in the community.

He will be back in Orillia on January 10th to speak to high school students at the Orillia Opera House.

More info about The Push For Change: <http://www.thepushforchange.com/>

(Photo courtesy: thepushforchange.com)