



OPP acting Inspector Paul Van Belleghem and Staff Sergeant Jeff Duggan dropped the puck on the hockey challenge game to raise awareness for youth homelessness and the Push For Change initiative. The Beaver Brae Broncos captains Katie Mahon and Savannah Prince and the St. Thomas Aquinas Saints captain took part. SHERI LAMB/Daily Miner and News/Postmedia Network

Students in Kenora received a lesson about homelessness and how it could happen to anybody on Thursday, Feb. 2.

The Ontario Provincial Police have partnered with Joe Roberts, a former homeless youth turned entrepreneur to promote his Push For Change campaign, where Roberts is walking across Canada, from St. John's, Nfld, to Vancouver, to raise money and awareness about youth homelessness. On Thursday, Feb. 2 members of the Kenora OPP organized a hockey challenge game involving the Beaver Brae Broncos and St. Thomas Aquinas Saints girls hockey teams and member of the OPP and Ministry of Natural Resources to raise money for the cause.

Const. Ronni Grosenick, community relations officer with the OPP in Kenora, said students between Grade 4 and 12 were at the Kenora Recreation Centre between 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. to watch the game, learn the importance of choices and play various challenges games themselves.

“These are the kids that are at those early stages in life when they’re making decisions that can affect them long term so it’s important that they understand that youth homelessness can affect anybody,” said Grosenick. “It’s not just people they see on the street now, it could be them, it could be their friends or their brother or sister. It’s

important for them to realize that homelessness touches everybody.”

Students paid a dollar to attend the game and if they wanted a wrist band to participate in any of the challenges it was a \$3 donation. Popcorn and soft drinks were also available for students.

The Broncos and Saints combined their teams for the fundraiser so both teams featured half Broncos and half Saints. The emergency services workers participating were Ryley Williams, Darryl Clark, Steve Harkof, Dean Hodges, John Frankcom, Taylor Desserre, Dennis Chevalier and Scott Chalkley.

The game was videotaped and will be combined with other hockey challenge games from across Ontario into a feature that will be played on Sportsnet during the Hockey Day in Canada festivities on Saturday, Feb. 18.

“It’s super cool because Hockey Day in Canada is in Kenora and we’ll be using the footage from this game today,” said Grosenick.

Joe Roberts was a homeless youth living on the streets of Vancouver when he eventually made his way home to Southern Ontario. Roberts downward spiral continued when he returned home.

“At one of his lows when he was really struggling his mother called the OPP to intervene and Joe attributes them to saving his life,” said Grosenick. “He’s still friends with the officer he interacted with that night.”

Joe Roberts’ journey across Canada will stop in Kenora on April 7 where he’ll host an event, “Walk and Talk with Joe” at Seven Generations Education Institute. His walk is expected to wrap up in September 2017 in Vancouver.

Another fundraiser in Kenora for Push For Change will be held Friday, March 3 during the Kenora Winter Carnival with the Sleepout Challenge, where people will have the opportunity to sleep under the stars under the Whitecap Pavilion.

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