

Pushing for change | Beacon Herald

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Joshua, 8, and sister Isabelle Lariviere, 12, sit in boxes symbolic of youth homelessness at the Push for Change Sleepout Challenge in St. Marys Saturday.

Joe Roberts was pushing his shopping cart along the Trans Canada Highway near White River, Ont. on Saturday.

It was day 294 for Roberts who started his Push for Change walk in Newfoundland on May 1 last year. He plans to finish up in British Columbia in September after walking 9,000 km. Roberts began the cross-Canada walk to raise awareness about youth homelessness and funds to invest in ending the crisis. One of the key issues is affordable housing, the Push for Change website says.

Roberts was almost 1,000 kms away from St. Marys but he was front of mind. The Perth County OPP, St. Marys Fire Department, Perth County Paramedic Services and Victim Services of Bruce Grey Perth welcomed the community to participate in the Educational Awareness Sleepout Challenge in support of the Push for Change and the Guns and Hoses hockey game.

Roberts was a homeless addict who managed to change his life and become a successful businessperson. He wants to make sure youth across the country don't end up on the streets.

As the OPP embraced the cause Perth County officers approached Bev Hagedorn, executive director of Stratford Perth Shelterlink to be a part of the day.

When Hagedorn read up on Roberts she was overcome with emotion.

"That man is like one of our kids but he's gone far enough into his life to be able to talk about it," Hagedorn said.

She jumped at the chance to participate and raise awareness about the plight of local homeless youth.

"A lot of people don't know. A lot of what we do is in the dark."

Jennifer Lariviere took her kids to the event which included an opportunity to climb into an OPP mobile support unit truck, an aerial firetruck and an ambulance.

Cardboard boxes on the ground symbolized the lack of a warm and loving home some youth experience.

"It's something we want our kids to be aware of. Not everyone is as fortunate as we are," Lariviere said.

St. Marys Mayor Al Strathdee said the event is good for the community and it helps first responders make connections with residents.

He added youth homelessness is a big problem.

"People get displaced and its hard to get started."

There was a popular free skate at the Pyramid Centre followed by the Guns and Hoses hockey game. Police and firefighters went head to head with paramedics boosting both teams.

Proceeds from the Guns and Hoses charity game were to be directed toward The Push for Change Foundation.

Police won the game last year and Perth County OPP detachment commander Insp. Rob Scott was feeling pretty confident before the puck drop that police would come out on top.

There was a wager involved. If the police lost Scott would wash a fire truck, and if the firefighters lost Chief Richard Anderson would wash two cruisers. The bet is to be settled on another day.

"We've got a good squad. I anticipate the chief will be washing some police cars," Scott said.

He anticipated correctly. Police won 5-2.

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