

Free skate to support Push for Change

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Joe Roberts with the Push for Change campaign walks with students at the Woodstock Community Complex on Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016. (MEGAN STACEY/Sentinel-Review)

COLLINGWOOD – Here’s a chance to lace up the blades and hit the ice with local police.

OPP is partnering with the Rotary Club of Collingwood Southern Georgian Bay on Feb. 14 to support youth in the community with a free skate at Central Park Arena in Collingwood.

OPP officers will be available for an open skate with youth and their families from 4 to 6 p.m. There will be booths in the arena to bring awareness of the services available to assist youth in the community.

The Rotary club’s event – Give Your Heart to Rotary Radio-a-Thon at Peak FM, in conjunction with OPP – hopes to increase awareness of the Push for Change initiative.

The Push for Change is a national awareness and youth empowerment campaign focused on ending youth homelessness.

The Push for Change is spearheaded by Joe Roberts, from Barrie, who was, at one time, a homeless youth living in Vancouver. While on the streets in Vancouver, he sold his boots for \$10 to buy drugs.

Shoeless and penniless, he called his mom in Ontario. Once back home, Roberts tried to get clean, but it was too difficult. One dark night, he had a firearm and was threatening suicide.

His mom called OPP, and that was a turning point for Roberts. He was ultimately able to get the help he needed.

He went on to graduate from college on the dean's list, became a successful CEO and started paying it forward, resulting in the Push for Change campaign.

As part of a national awareness campaign, Roberts is pushing a shopping cart 9,000 km across Canada and stopping at various communities along the way to speak about the issues at the root of youth homelessness.

Although Roberts didn't visit Collingwood as he made his way through Simcoe County at around the new year, the Rotary club and OPP want help him in his endeavour.

OPP detachments across the province are engaging in more than 170 community-based events to assist Roberts and the ultimate goal of the Push for Change, which is to raise awareness and bring about change related to youth homelessness.

Roberts's walk has taken him through Sault Ste. Marie as he continues his trek to Vancouver.