



Members of the Rotary Club of Ingersoll have stepped up to the Barefoot Challenge to raise awareness and funds to support The Push for Change, a campaign to bring awareness to youth homelessness in Canada. Campaign co-founder Joe Roberts is pushing a shopping cart across Canada and will make a stop in Ingersoll Dec. 12.

INGERSOLL - The Push for Change got a little kickstart in Ingersoll Thursday when the Rotary Club stepped up to the Barefoot Challenge.

As members arrived for their weekly Rotary meeting at the Ingersoll 50+ Activity Centre, they were to remove their footwear in support of one facet of The Push for Change – a movement to create sustainable change for Canadian youth and engage the citizens of the nation to get involved in ending youth homelessness. According to the organization's website www.thepushforchange.com, the Barefoot Challenge is an empathic experience of going without your boots for one hour to raise awareness and funds to support youth homelessness prevention. Rotarians who forgot, or chose not to remove their footwear gave donations to the cause.

The Challenge was also to raise awareness of the Dec. 12 visit of campaign co-founder and former homeless addict Joe Roberts who is pushing a shopping cart across Canada in support of the mission. Roberts and co-founder Sean Richardson share a passion to help people see more in themselves, in others, and in their circumstances than they currently see, and to help them understand the processes for getting past their biggest obstacles in life, according to the website.

Past Rotary president Terry Gough met Roberts at a conference and was moved by the man's mission. Roberts also spoke to Ingersoll Rotary to bring awareness of his campaign.

“Joe said one of the days that was most humiliating to him was when he sold his boots for \$10 to buy drugs,” Gough told the Rotary group.

So between Gough and current Rotary president Tammy Jeffery-Larder, the challenge to go without shoes was issued to their fellow members, and Jeffery-Larder will issue the same challenge to the other clubs in the district, with the hope that Rotary will support The Push for Change (PFC) nationally. At Thursday's meeting alone, \$600 was contributed to PFC.

“We promote the fact of what he's doing and that he's coming here,” said Jeffery-Larder.

Special events are planned for when Roberts is in town, including a presentation to the youth at Ingersoll District Collegiate Institute around noon and a community engagement event in the late afternoon.

“Lots of people are getting involved,” said Gough.

Ahead of Roberts' visit is the National SleepOut Challenge on Nov. 25. It's when participants are encouraged to spend a night sleeping out of their comfort zone as a way to learn more about what 6,000 young people experience each night in Canada. More information about participating in the SleepOut Challenge is also on the PFC website under the 'Get Involved' tab.

Jeffery-Larder said she hopes the challenges will be issued to other service organizations and service providers in order to exponentially increase the awareness and funds to support youth homelessness.