

The Watch 2023 Annual Report



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The Watch

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The Watch – 2023 Annual Report

Introduction

The Watch Program is a volunteer-based initiative of Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) with the objective of enhancing the community as a safe and friendly place for everyone to live, work, shop and enjoy, through social outreach, connection, and intervention. Members of The Watch manage a range of issues and events that historically involved police intervention, but in reality, are not part of core police functions and most do not require police involvement. In managing these kinds of events and activities in place of the police, capacity is created for the police to manage incidents that involve criminal activity.

The Watch acts as the eyes and ears of social and community services agencies as well as our emergency service providers and they connect people with local public and private support agencies and organizations. Watch teams connect people with detoxification and treatment services, or housing and shelter. They arrange transportation, help people access services, assist businesses in managing negative behaviours in their area and a whole host of other activities to serve and help everyone. The Watch provides a highly visible deterrence to negative behaviours and crime, and a willingness and capacity to intervene in support of those who may be victimized in some way by crime. The Watch also acts in time of medical emergency providing lifesaving first aid and nasal Narcan when needed. The Watch provides a Safe Walk service for anyone in our area who is not comfortable walking alone from one place to another. When anyone needs help and The Watch is nearby, they will help.

Patrol Area

The Watch covers the LPS Beat 10 area which extends between Scenic Drive and Mayor Magrath Drive from west to east, and from 5 Avenue North to 6 Avenue South. During the warmer times of the year, The Watch also can be found in the river bottom Battle Park. This is a patrol area of nearly 8 square kilometers, which is divided into five smaller patrol areas numbered moving from west to east in order of priority based upon the volume of incidents and interaction.

Human Resources

The Watch provided a total of 4284 hours of service in 2023, operating daily from 10:00 am until 10:00 pm. Throughout the year The Watch averaged slightly more than 19 volunteers per month, with a total of 2518 volunteer hours provided for an average of 381 hours provided monthly. Volunteers are supervised on the street by employee Team Leads who are responsible for patrol planning, reporting requirements, communications and the safety of all volunteers on their patrol team. Because of the nature of the work and the requirement for accountability and reliability of a designated leader on the team, competent and well-trained employee Team Leads are critical to delivering service of The Watch. That and the fact that Volunteers are not available for every shift make the use of employee Team Leads critical to the service delivery model which provides citizens with service seven days a week. Watch Teams are always comprised of at least one Volunteer and one Team Lead, but there are many times when our teams are deployed with only Team Leads because there are no volunteers scheduled for a particular shift.

Volunteers are required to provide a minimum of one four hour shift a month through the year. Every day there are volunteer shifts which start at 10:00 am, 2:00 pm and 6:00 pm. Most volunteers provide the minimum number of monthly hours that are asked for, and a few provide many more than that. The evening shifts are the most covered shift as the volunteers hold full time and part time jobs in the community. While some students can volunteer for some of the day time shifts when their classes allow. During a four-hour volunteer shift it is not uncommon for a volunteer to walk for more than 10 kilometers. The position's physical demands, along with preconceived negative misperceptions of downtown safety are two potential obstacles in attracting volunteer applicants.

In 2023 there were two groups of Volunteers and Team Leads recruited and hired. They completed the required Basic Watch Course held in February, and October. The training covers such topics as report writing and note taking, tactical communication, street awareness, drug awareness, radio communication operations, mental health awareness, addiction awareness, indigenous cultural awareness and history and emergency first aid.

To the end of 2023 there have been 100 Volunteers and 33 Team Leads trained and deployed in The Watch program since it's inception in 2019. There have been Volunteers and Team Leads who have gone on to policing careers with the Lethbridge Police Service as community peace officers and police officers, and with the Taber Police Service, Medicine Hat Police Service and RCMP. In addition, some of our staff have gone on to other related occupations such as emergency dispatch, provincial and federal parks enforcement agencies, and social outreach agencies.

Recruiting & Hiring

The Watch made it a priority to increase its recruiting efforts for 2023. The Watch attended various community recruiting events throughout the year and has increased its recruiting from both The University of Lethbridge and The Lethbridge College as well as attended indigenous career fairs.

The Watch has attended The Lethbridge College for classroom presentations to Criminal Justice (CJ) students, delivered presentation for first year Criminal Justice students orientation day and attended Criminal Justice networking day. The Watch has also attended The University of Lethbridge with the Lethbridge Police Recruiting team for their annual career fair. The Watch attended career fairs hosted by both SAAMIS employment and Training Association and Community Futures Treaty Seven (CFT7). This year The Watch hired an indigenous summer student as a Team Lead through a partnership with CFT7 and the Lethbridge Police Service.

In 2023 The Watch ran two hiring processes for volunteers with training sessions in February and October. The Watch hired 13 new volunteers along with two previous volunteers for a total of 15 volunteers hired for 2023.

The Watch faced significant turnover in its paid staff in 2023. The Watch had six Team Leads leave this year while adding a new manager, five Team Leads and two part time Team Leads. This brought total team count to five full time Team Leads and three part time (casual) Team Leads.

Operational Priorities

The operational priority of The Watch is to enhance the perception of safety in the downtown, and diverts calls for service that police would have to respond to. These calls are historically negative behaviours that are more inconvenient, annoying or unsightly than unlawful. By diverting these calls The Watch creates further capacity for The Lethbridge Police Service as it allows officers to attend more police calls rather than tying up officers to attend an event they are not required for. This service The Watch provides is two-fold as it diverts a police call and provides a service to the community who still require assistance for these types of events.

Since its inception, to access The Watch and its services, community members had to call The Watch phone and speak with a team lead. This year in order to increase The Watch's capacity to divert calls the Public Safety Communications Centre (PSCC) started to direct The Watch to community service calls that were classified as Public Service Street Behaviour (PS-07) calls. These two types of calls involved non-violent unwanted guests in a business that had been asked to leave or to conduct wellness checks. This change allowed PSCC to direct The Watch to these calls that were typically dispatched to a police officer or another partner agency called the

Diversion Outreach Team (DOT). Those calls to DOT often resulted in a police call being generated as DOT's mandate was transportation and not dealing with wellness checks or unwanted guests. This option has increased The Watch's capacity to help defer police calls and still provide assistance to those community members calling in for help. In 2023 The Watch attended 109 PS-07 calls from implementation in mid April to December 31, 2023.

In 2023 there were 9038 Watch events and activities, which involved primarily public service activities such as high visibility location checks, wellness checks on people who do not appear to be conscious, assists to business, de-escalation and social agency referrals. There were a number of emergency medical calls and police calls in that total events number as well as Safe Walks and Fire events. Police involved events totaled 55 in this past year, continuing that trend of recent past years where the police are involved in less than 1% of Watch activities.

Connecting People

Partnerships and working relationships with government departments, publicly funded service providers and private not for profit service providers have continued to be enhanced, and The Watch members on the street act as a conduit to help these agencies provide services and assistance to the unsheltered and addicted populations. The Watch works with over 20 such private and public partner agencies, and Alberta government departments to connect people with service. They also help share necessary information related to matters of community corrections, child welfare and community support to help unsheltered and addicted people navigate the difficulties of their lives and receive important information and support in relation to these matters. Finally, members of The Watch work to help members of the vulnerable community have the means and be able to reach out to connect with family and friends that can provide them with the necessary connections they need for support and assistance in their circumstances.

The Watch continues to work in advocating for people who are interested in entering detox and treatment for their substance use disorder, and in 2023 have advocated and assisted with completing and submitting intake documents on 11 occasions for unhoused people in the community. In addition, The Watch was able to become involved in assisting addicted people become engaged in the Alberta Virtual Opioid Dependency Program (VODP) where Watch members can contact VODP intake workers and assist in the telephone intake and physician consultations that leads to the medically prescribed anti-opioid medication and subsequent follow up in the program. In 2023 The Watch assisted one person in gaining access to the program, providing their necessary medical information to the VODP physician and accessing their prescribed medications, as well as follow up for subsequent prescription treatments for opioid addiction.

Wellness Checks

While out on the street, members of The Watch check on any person whom they find who is either apparently in distress, or they appear to be unconscious or unresponsive. In 2023 these checks were carried out 581 times, with some of these checks resulting in the detection of someone who was having a medical emergency such as an opioid overdose, or some other medical issue. In most cases these are not medical emergencies but are opportunities to start a conversation with someone who might otherwise not have anyone to interact with. There are times when this interaction brings a sense of wellness to a homeless and addicted person, and is what they need to get them started, or continuing in their day.

Saving Lives

All Watch Team members are trained in emergency first aid and cardio pulmonary resuscitation. Team Leads are further trained in the use of nasal Narcan spray and carry two 4 mg single dose spray devices with them while on duty. In 2023 there were 66 instances where the teams were on patrol and were either summoned

to a location, or they encountered a person in medical distress as a result of an opioid overdose. In each instance there was a life saved by alerting Emergency Medical Services, providing lifesaving first aid and administering nasal Narcan spray. In 2023 Watch Teams administered 120 doses of Narcan during these 66 events. In addition, there were 42 other instances where a person who was being checked on and was found to need emergency medical services. EMS paramedics were summoned by Watch members to provide the needed medical attention to the matter at hand.

Safe Walks

There were 498 occasions where Watch members provided Safe Walk services to people who were alone and did not feel comfortable walking to where they had to go in the downtown area. These included walking people from their place of work to their vehicle, being with someone while they wait for a ride or an appointment, walking to the bank, or walking between home and work.

Needle Pickup

The Watch in the past did not directly pick up improperly disposed of used needles, as they do not have capacity to carry sharps containers and tongs on their person while they walk. Best practice has been to contact Clean Sweep a program offered by the Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) with employees who have tools and capacity to ensure that needles are properly picked up and disposed of when they are discovered. This year however The Watch began picking up needles in situations where the picking up of found needles is of an urgent nature (areas that are of a high traffic nature or a weekend and clean sweep is not working), Team Leads may now use their discretion and pick up those needles. Team leads have been provided a Sharps container in The Watch truck or may use portable sharps container in Watch black bag using grabbing tool provided.

There were more than 862 such needles located and properly disposed of by our partners after being notified by a Watch patrol.

Other Activities

In the community there are people who, from time to time, need a means to be able to travel whether it be to the shelter, to get a meal, to an appointment or to the home of a friend. The Watch arranged transportation for people, primarily through the Diversion Outreach Team (DOT) and occasionally through one of our other partners, on 280 occasions in 2023. The Watch also meets monthly with The DOT team to discuss how The Watch and DOT can support each other.

The Watch is part of the City of Lethbridge Finding Solutions subcommittee which meets monthly with other support agencies.

The Watch attends every month the Spirit Café an Indigenous awareness program ran out of the library by Alberta Health Services.

The Watch also made phone calls on behalf of those without access to a telephone, took messages and delivered them to the person for whom they were intended, and allowed people to speak to friends and family through speakerphone on their Watch cellular telephones. In 2023 Watch cellular phones were used by people without a telephone or access to one on 578 occasions to make calls to friends and family or to reach out to contact a support service or worker.

During the tear down phase of The Lethbridge Hotel the City approached The Watch to conduct daily checks of the temporary fencing. This was being done by Lethbridge Fire but were unable to continue so The Watch stepped in and took over this role.

The Watch was able to assist a MacEwan university Psychiatric Nursing student with a short-term placement. This student was able to develop a Mental Health pamphlet for their course and The Watch uses during their training. Pamphlet speaks about mental health, taking care of yourself and how to access services if needed.

Program Changes in 2023

In 2023 The Watch received a new manager and with this change came a review of how The Watch operated and how this program could expand in certain areas:

- One of the new changes implemented was having The Watch program absorbed into the framework of the Lethbridge Police Service (LPS). For its first three years of its existence this program operated outside of certain supports afforded to existing LPS units. This was done solely to support this program without knowing if it would survive longer than the three years that the pilot project was commissioned for. This meant that The Watch operated outside of areas like Fleet Services for its vehicle, and access to certain items through quartermaster. At the end of 2023 The Watch vehicle is now under Fleet Services, and has access to all supports within LPS. This also meant now that The Watch employees were able to access more training within LPS. This year Team Leads have attended training sessions on self defence, leadership, mental health (R2MR) and field training evaluation courses.
- Other changes have been the implementation of Graffiti and Garbage Watch program. This involves Watch members, while out on patrol, identifying areas tagged by graffiti and areas with excess debris. Watch Team Leads capture information (address & photos of area) and this information is shared with Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ). BRZ then deals with garage clean up through their Clean Sweep program and also have a graffiti clean up program for downtown core.
- Already mentioned was the implementation of Public Service Street Behaviour calls (PS-07) that now allows PSCC to dispatch The Watch to calls they receive that fall under non violent unwanted guests and wellness checks.
- In the beginning of 2023 it was identified that the radios The Watch use did not have their emergency response buttons activated. This button allows for a Team Lead or volunteer to push it, which sets off an alarm in PSCC and allows for hands free talking for 3 seconds. This button was activated along with new policy made in the event it is activated either intentionally or by accident.
- Policy was added to allow for past volunteers or Team Leads to join The Watch again in a streamlined process. New Policy was added to help facilitate this change. Two volunteers were added to the roster since implementing this change.
- New business rules were developed around reporting fires. In an attempt to capture how many fires are being set in the downtown core and share this information The Watch now reports any fires new or old they come across. In the past this information was only captured on fires that required a Lethbridge Fire Department response.

- PSCC will now inform Watch members (who are out patrolling) of any major events occurring in their zones and which areas they are to avoid.
- PSCC timers were added so when Watch members book out at location checks a 15 minute timer is set. If a Watch member is not heard from in that time PSCC will contact them to check on their status.
- With the implementation of paramedics added to the short term holding facility at LPS, paramedics have now been authorized to go on walk alongs with The Watch team and help the at risk population connect with the Alberta Virtual Opioid Dependency Program (VODP).

Community Events attended in 2023

The Watch attended the following events in 2023:

- Attend Spirt Café once a month.
- Attend Finding Safe Solutions committee once a month.
- Attend DOT meeting once a month.
- March 16, attended Lethbridge College classroom to give a Watch presentation.
- March 21, attended Queens Jubilee Medal presentation for elder at Lethbridge Correctional Centre.
- March 23, meet with Sgt Darrouch and downtown business owner about safety concerns.
- March 24, attended Streets Alive fundraiser.
- March 30, attended St Francis JR High School and gave downtown safety presentation with Cst Realini.
- April 27, attended DVAT network breakfast.
- May 10, attended Mchappy days at downtown MacDonalds.
- May 13, attended and assisted with Kids Safety Day hosted by Old Navy.
- May 15, attended Red Dress Day (National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two Spirited People) held in Galt Gardens.
- August 19, attended and helped with Shoes for Kids event.
- August 19, attended event Running for Heroes.
- August 22, participated in Whoop up Days Parade.
- September 5, gave presentation at Lethbridge College first year Criminal Justice students orientation day.
- September 21, attended Spirit Cafes Indiginious Day event in Galt Gardens.
- September 27, gave presentation to The Original Breakfast Club.
- September 19, assisted with Lethbridge Police Run.
- October 16, gave presentation to Rotary club.
- October 16, spoke to media at safety talk hosted by YWCA at Lethbridge Park and Ride.
- October 20, attended YWCA Take Back The Night walk in downtown core.
- October 21, attended Lethbridge College Criminal Justice Networking Day and Career Fair.
- October 24, attended event sponsored by BRZ and gave Watch presentation.
- November 28, attended Lethbridge Probation and gave presentation.
- December 01, attended Lethbridge Hurricanes Teddy Bear Toss and helped with event.
- December 02, attended Lethbridge Police Toy Checkstop and helped with event.

Going Forward in 2024

The Watch will be celebrating its 5-year anniversary this year and is looking forward to 2024 and providing the best service they can to the citizens of Lethbridge. There will be recruitment drives in 2024 to expand number of volunteers and updates to Watch web site to make access information about The Watch easier.

**The Watch Monthly Statistics
2023**

	Month	Volunteer Hours	Average Monthly Volunteer Hours	Number of Volunteers	LPS Events	Street Behaviour Events	EMS Events	Fire Events	All Public Service	Wellness Checks*	Safe Walks	Detox Intake	Transportation	Needle Pick Up	Narcans Used Events	Phone Calls Walk Phone
1	Jan	272		19	4	0	4	0	898	34	47	3	19	104	4	33
2	Feb	196		17	5	0	14	0	798	40	61	1	15	83	10	46
3	Mar	334		25	8	0	14	0	763	68	70	0	28	65	7	36
4	Apr	268		23	3	8	8	1	548	86	36	0	20	37	6	49
5	May	220		23	9	30	20	0	609	100	32	1	32	106	12	82
6	Jun	212		16	6	31	19	0	690	62	52	0	22	69	6	58
7	Jul	188		15	3	14	11	0	759	48	21	0	23	103	5	45
8	Aug	136		14	1	13	7	0	527	26	34	1	14	20	5	70
9	Sep	136		14	2	3	5	0	463	17	35	2	16	48	2	29
10	Oct	188		20	2	4	2	0	530	18	45	1	23	47	2	31
11	Nov	192		22	1	3	6	2	479	54	29	2	37	95	4	52
12	Dec	176		22	11	3	4	2	601	28	36	0	31	85	2	47
Month Average			209.83	19.17												
YTD Totals		2518			55	109	114	5	7665	581	498	11	280	862	65	578
										7.6%						
Total Events YTD		8337			0.7%	1.3%	1.4%		92%	7.0%	6.0%					

Historical data of calls from 2019-2023

