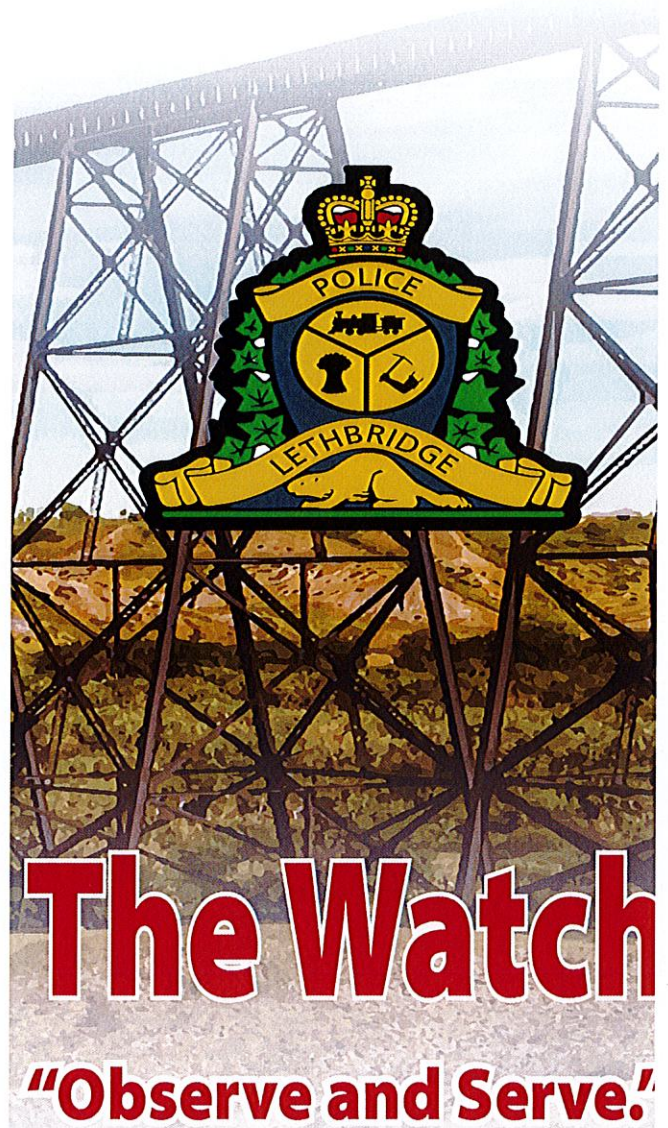


# The Watch 2024

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The Watch  
Authored by: Shane Kisinger





## **The Watch – 2024 Annual Report**

### **Introduction**

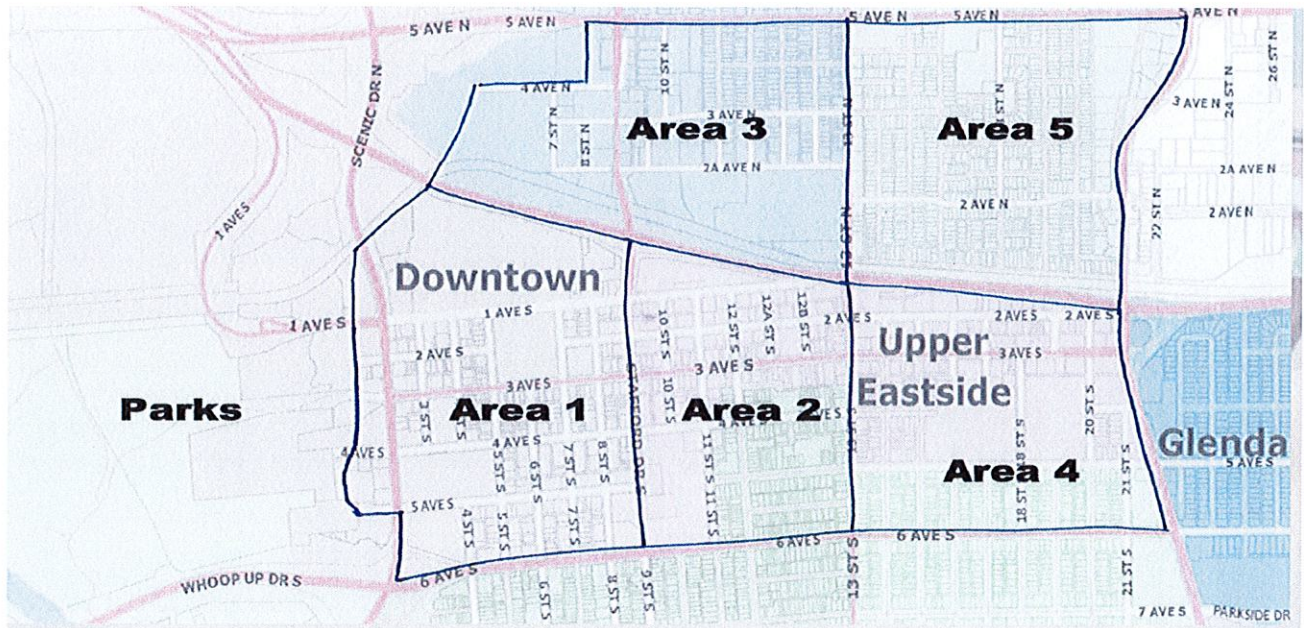
The Watch Program is a volunteer-based initiative of Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) with the objective of enhancing the community as a safe and friendly place for everyone to live, work, shop and enjoy, through social outreach, connection, and intervention. Members of The Watch manage a range of issues 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.



## Areas Covered

The Watch covers 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 area of nearly 8 square kilometers, which is divided into five smaller areas numbered moving from west to east in order of priority based upon the volume of incidents and interaction.



## Human Resources

Three team leads work every day (maximum of 3 and minimum of 2) from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM (except holidays). These team leads supervise the volunteers and The Watch program averaged slightly more than 19 volunteers per month, with a total of **1899** volunteer hours provided for an average of 158 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 team. With the 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 employed 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. 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 2024 there was 15 volunteers recruited and hired. They completed the required Basic Watch Course held in 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 2024 there have been 113 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, Calgary Police Service and Blood Tribe 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, corrections and social outreach agencies.

### **Recruiting**

The Watch continued to focus on recruiting and attended recruiting events with Lethbridge Police Service recruiting officers in 2024. The Watch attended various community recruiting events throughout the year and has increased its recruiting from both The University of Lethbridge and The Lethbridge Polytechnic as well as attending indigenous career fairs.

The Watch has attended The Lethbridge Polytechnic for classroom presentations to Criminal Justice (CJ) students, delivered presentation for first year Criminal Justice students orientation day and attended CJ networking day.

### **Operational Priorities**

The operational priority of The Watch is to enhance the perception of safety in the downtown, and diverts calls for service from the police. 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 still provides a service to the community who still require assistance for these types of events. Police involved events totaled **46** in this past year, continuing that



trend of recent past years where the police are involved in less than 1% of Watch activities.

Since its inception, to access The Watch and its services, community members had to call The Watch phone and speak with a Team Lead. In order to increase The Watch's ability 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 which involved non-violent unwanted guests in a business or 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 2024 The Watch attended **67** PS-07 calls.

In 2024 there were **7443** Watch events and activities, which involved primarily public service activities such as high visibility location checks, assists to business, de-escalation and social agency referrals.

### **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 2024 these checks were carried out **284** times, with some of these checks resulting in 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 (CPR). 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 2024 there were **16** 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 (EMS), providing lifesaving first aid and administering nasal Narcan spray. In 2024 Watch Teams administered **23** doses of Narcan during these 16 events. In addition, there were **33** 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 **239** 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. The 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. In 2023 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 i.e. parks or on a weekend when 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 carrying bag using grabbing tool provided.

In years previous to 2024 needles were counted per incident and not per individual needle. Part way through 2024 this was changed to reflect counting each individual needle picked up.

In 2024 there were more than **688** needles located in Watch zones.

## **Fires**

In 2023 The Watch started to track the numerous small fires they were coming across either active or recent. These fires are usually very small and set by the at-risk population to stay warm in the colder months.

In 2024 The Watch came across **15** of these events.



## 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 vulnerable 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 vulnerable 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 thus can provide them with the necessary connections they need for support and assistance in their circumstances.

In August 2024 the Watch entered into agreement with City of Lethbridge - Community and Social Development (CSD) to help provide social outreach to those subjects found in encampments and being asked to move. After being served notice to vacate The Watch will attend these encampments to offer supports acting as system navigators for those individuals who wished to accept outreach. The Watch also is being assisted by CSD outreach workers and attended **14** encampments this year offering such outreach supports.

The Watch will still continue to provide outreach to and advocate for at the risk population who are interested in entering detox and treatment for their substance use disorder, and in 2024 have advocated and assisted with completing and submitting intake documents on **10** occasions for unhoused people in the

community. The Watch in this new outreach role now attends a weekly meeting of Coordinated Access Round Table (CART):

*The Lethbridge Housing Authority (LHA), in pursuit of its mission to combat homelessness, administers a recovery- focused Coordinated Access Round Table (CART) in partnership with various community and funded agency partners. The primary aim of CART is to minimize obstacles that individuals face in accessing the appropriate support when needed.*

In 2024 The Watch was able to advocate for 1 at risk individual with the assistance of CSD outreach and secure housing in a program for this subject who was previously experiencing homelessness.

The Watch continues to be engaged in the Alberta Virtual Opioid Dependency Program (VODP). 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 2024 The Watch had no applications submitted for VODP program. The Watch has been assisting this program within LPS by picking up medications (51 times in 2024) for this program as it is administered in Lethbridge Police Short Term Holding facility. Nursing staff assigned to this program also go out on walk-alongs with The Watch.

### **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 **249** occasions in 2024. The Watch also meets monthly with The DOT team to discuss how The Watch and DOT can support each other.

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

The Watch attends twice a month meeting hosted by CSD Encampment Response Team. This meeting is also attended by Lethbridge Housing, Lethbridge Fire, Lethbridge Police Service - Downtown Sergeant and Community Peace Officer Sergeant, and Business Revitalization Zone- Clean Sweep manager.

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 2024 Watch cellular phones were used by people without a telephone or access to one on **328** occasions to make calls to friends and family or to reach out to contact a support service or worker.

In 2024 Team Leads attended Supervisor course and Train the Trainer courses hosted by LPS. Team Leads also attended Community Helpers training provided by Lethbridge Family Services.

The Watch celebrated its five-year anniversary in 2024 and held a BBQ in Galt Gardens to share this milestone with the community.

## Program Changes in 2024

- Safewalks did not have a safety timer built in with CAD when team leads booked out on one. This was changed to have a timer go off after 20 minutes and PSCC will check in with those Team Leads on the safewalk.
- In May Team Leads began picking up medications for VOPD program and transporting these medications to VODP staff in Short Term Holding Facility. The Watch conducted **51** of these pick up and drop offs in 2024.
- Needle pick up numbers were changed to reflect actual numbers of needles. Past practise had been to note the event but not the specific number of needles dealt with.
- A workflow was added in NICHE so Staff Sgts and others could sent FYI tasks to The Watch.
- The Watch moved from Support Services Division to Field Operations Division, with Watch manager now reporting directly to the Inspector of Field Operations.
- In May The Watch partnered with Community Social Development and the Encampment Response Team (ERT) to provide outreach to vulnerable population. The Watch will assist encampment team outreach workers in providing outreach to the at risk population after they are served notices to vacate by ERT team. As well as provide outreach to those members of vulnerable community they come across. In 2024 The Watch conducted **38** outreach events and **14** encampment outreach events. Outreach code (Public Service -08) was added to reflect these new duties.
- In December two Senior Team Leads and one team lead were hired to start in Jan 2025.



## 2024 Calls for Service

### The Watch Monthly Statistics

Enter Year

Month	Volunteer Hours	Monthly Volunteer Hours	Number of Volunteers	LPS Events	Street Behaviour Events	Encamp Outreach	EMS Events	Fire Events	All Public Service	Wellness Checks*	Safe Walks	Detox Intake	Transportation	Needle Pick Up	Narcotics Used Events	Phone Calls Walk Phone
Jan	152		21	1	1		3	3	644	14	17	0	15	41	0	24
Feb	152		17	3	2		10	1	655	13	31	1	22	44	3	38
Mar	132		17	3	1		8	1	620	18	21	1	21	54	4	31
Apr	124		17	2	1		4	1	632	29	17	1	26	66	1	47
May	116		16	5	6		4	2	642	21	20	1	24	54	1	71
Jun	114		16	8	13		4	2	633	36	13	2	15	67	1	54
Jul	114		16	4	14		4	0	618	25	18	0	22	82	3	65
Aug	113		15	9	7		7	4	664	20	20	2	23	72	0	69
Sep	88		15	5	10		0	2	547	21	24	2	27	44	3	75
Oct	224		27	2	8		0	2	616	37	21	0	23	70	0	57
Nov	302		25	3	2		3	0	582	424	23	0	16	39	0	38
Dec	268		25	1	2		4	3	590	418	14	0	15	55	0	47
Month Average		158.25	18.92													
YTD Totals	1899		46	67	14		52	15	7443	1076	239	10	249	688	16	616

14.5%

Total Events YTD

7795

0.6%

0.9%

0.7%

95%

13.8%

3.1%

\* Included in All Public Service

LPS Events Includes Assault, Drugs, Public Safety, Public Intoxication, Theft and Other Events

EMS Events Any time EMS is called.

Fire Events Any time Fire Services are called.

Public Service Includes Public Service Events and Other Public Service Assistance, location checks, assist to business, wellness checks, deescalation, found ID, motor vehicle assistance, giving directions, minor first aid, parking meter assistance, social agency referral & other public service.

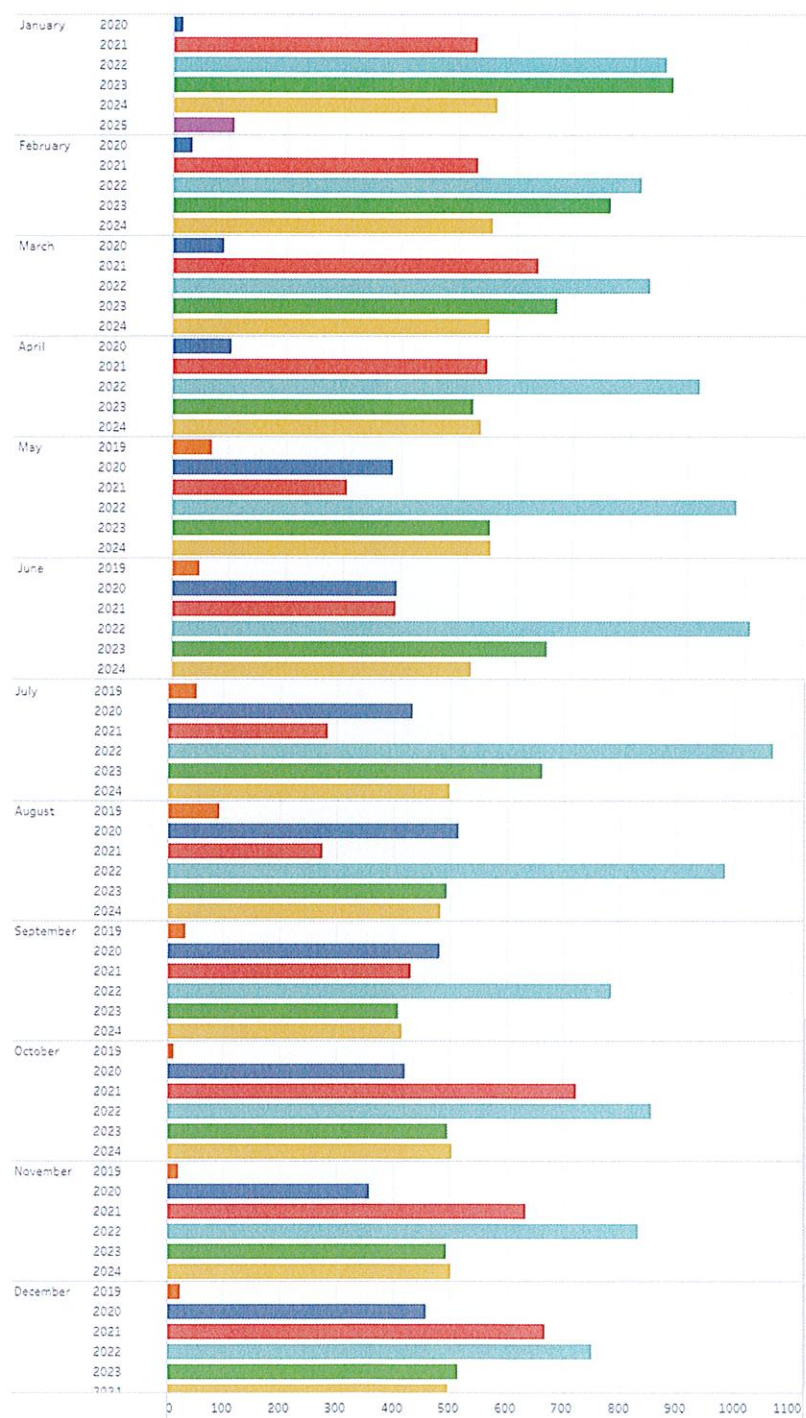
Safe Walks Any time a Safe Walk is provided.

Narcotics Used Any instance when any Narcotics is provided.

Transportation Any time Transportation is arranged by DOI, Streets Alive or SAGD. Cuidadiversion Outreach Team is accessed.

Needle P/U Any time improperly discarded needles are located and ARCHES needle pick up is accessed.

## Historical data of calls from 2019-2024





## The Watch 2019-2024

1. Total volunteers-**113**
2. Total team leads-**33**
3. Total managers-**4**

### 2019

- **1409** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks)
- **83** (Safewalks)
- **480** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **528** (Needle pick up calls)
- **2** (Overdose calls with Narcan deployments)
- **3647** (Volunteer hours)

### 2020

- **4560** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks)
- **123** (Safewalks)
- **494** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **1008** (Needle pick up calls)
- **38** (Overdose calls with Narcan deployments)
- **3442** (Volunteer hours)

### 2021

- **6781** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks)
- **105** (Safewalks)
- **409** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **1166** (Needle pick up calls)
- **16** (Detox Intake applications)
- **47** overdose calls with Narcan deployments
- **4483** volunteer hours

### 2022

- **11,292** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks)

- **426** (Safewalks)
- **338** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **1399** (Needle pick up calls)
- **21** (Detox Intake applications)
- **47** overdose calls with Narcan deployments
- **4483** volunteer hours

#### 2023

- **7948** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks),
- **498** (Safewalks)
- **280** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **862** (Needle pick up calls)
- **11** (Detox Intake applications)
- **65** (Overdose calls with Narcan deployments)
- **2518** (Volunteer hours)

#### 2024

- **7907** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks),
- **239** (Safewalks)
- **249** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **688** (Needle pick up calls)
- **10** (Detox Intake applications)
- **16** (Overdose calls with 23 Narcan deployments)
- **1899** (Volunteer hours)

#### Total Calls:

- **39,897** (LPS, EMS, All Public Service, Wellness Checks)
- **1474** (Safewalks)
- **2250** (Calls for transportation by DOT)
- **4963** (Needle pick up calls)
- **58** (Detox applications)
- **199** (Overdose calls with Narcan deployments)
- **20565** (Volunteer hours)



