

The Watch – 2022 Annual Report

“Observe and Serve”

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 4248 hours of service in 2022, operating daily from 10:00 am until 10:00 pm. Throughout the year The Watch averaged slightly more than 22 volunteers per month, with a total of 4576 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 every week 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 weekly 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, we have two retired volunteers who make their availability exclusively for the morning or afternoon shift. 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 2022 there were three groups of Volunteers and Team Leads recruited and hired. They completed the required Basic Watch Course held in March, July 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.

This year, in partnership with some post-secondary education institutions, there were three students who completed practicum placements with The Watch. They were students who were already in Volunteer positions with The Watch while continuing their studies in Criminal Justice at Lethbridge College and Royal Roads University, and in Social Work at the University of Calgary.

To the end of 2022 there have been 88 Volunteers and 30 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.

Operational Priorities

The operational priority of The Watch is to enhance the perception of safety in the downtown, and work to create capacity for the police by managing events that historically prompted people to call the police for, in spite of the fact that there was really nothing for the police to do as there was no crime committed and no danger to anyone. Rather, these things deal with negative behaviours that are more inconvenient, annoying or unsightly than unlawful. In 2022 there were 11,282 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 87 in this past year, continuing that trend of recent past years where the police are involved in less than 1% of Watch activities. Not everything that The Watch does would have required a police response, and we can't count what does not happen. However, we can say that some requests from citizens such as additional police patrols and high visibility presence where crimes potentially occur, or have occurred, and dealing with negative behaviours that are not necessarily unlawful but result in a phone call for police attendance, are managed more efficiently by Watch teams.

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 2022 have advocated and assisted with completing and submitting intake documents on 21 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 2022 The Watch assisted two people 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 2022 these checks were carried out 436 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 2022 there were 31 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 2022 Watch Teams administered 43 doses of Narcan during these 31 events. In addition, there were 29 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 426 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 does 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. However they do have the tools and capacity to notify the proper service to ensure that needles are properly picked up and disposed of when they are discovered. There were more than 1399 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 338 occasions in 2022. They 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 2022 Watch cellular phones were used by people without a telephone or access to one on 412 occasions to make calls to friends and family or to reach out to contact a support service or worker.

Strategic Deployment

This past year saw the development and implementation of our Daily Watch Bulletin. Our administrative analyst put together a process by which information regarding Watch activities captured in the Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD) in the Public Safety Communications Centre (PSCC) throughout the shift are extracted so we can see where we are working, what our teams are doing and when they are busiest. This allows our teams to plan their day and patrols as much as possible to see where the police have been operating in response to calls for service, and how our team may be present in an area to manage issues before they become calls for service to the police when the police are not really required. This has led to an efficiency and an increase in the amount of certain activities, such as location checks, where crimes and negative behaviours have been experienced. Members of The Watch can then work to be present and visible as a deterrent to these activities, and to offer the proper supports and services that help people avoid becoming engaged with the police.

2022 Alberta Community Justice Award

The Watch was recognized with a 2022 Alberta Community Justice Award in June in Lacombe, Alberta. The award was presented by Minister of Justice and Solicitor General Tyler Shandro in the category of Partnership and Collaboration.

Watch Program Manager Blackfoot Naming

In August of this year The Watch Program Manager Jeff Cove was presented with a Blackfoot name in a ceremony held on Heritage Day as part of the festivities held at the Southern Alberta Ethnic Association Multicultural Centre. The name litspoimah'ka, meaning Travelling Amongst, was presented by Piikani Elder Morris Little Wolf and is symbolic of the collective and interconnected journey of all living things as they travel through life together. It was given in recognition of Jeff's years of service in Lethbridge within the urban Indigenous community, and to provide guidance and direction in his future position interactions with the Blackfoot people.

Going Forward in 2023

In the new year, The Watch will become involved in assisting in collecting graffiti location information and areas where trash has accumulated to be shared with the Clean Sweep Teams for abatement. Trash and graffiti are two things that make people feel unsafe and getting these things cleaned quicker will contribute to lessening the feeling people have that they are not safe in areas where this exists.

The Watch is also working with enhancing the working relationships with the downtown mobile outreach and support teams as well as the Downtown Policing Unit. This will hopefully help get people connected with supports and services in the community to try and keep people from becoming the subject of a police response when there are other, more appropriate, supports and services available that can mitigate negative behaviours.

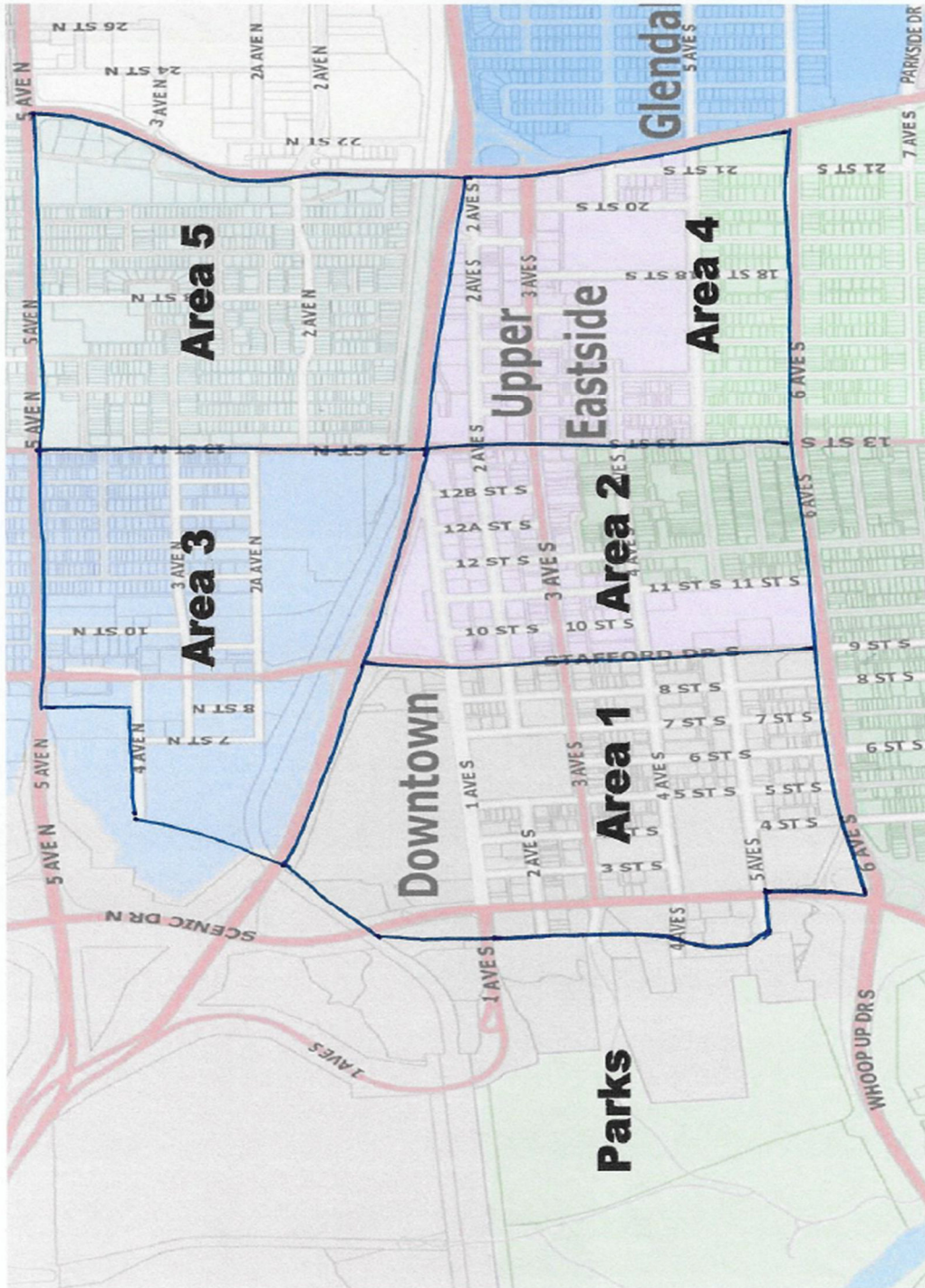
The Watch will also be reviewing their Volunteer safety procedures and radio protocols in an effort to ensure that our people are safe for any potential issue they may face. While the number of instances where a Team Lead or Volunteer has been threatened or even assaulted is rare, preparedness is key to effective responses in such situations.

Finally, the ability to access services and enhance service delivery is always a key component of our program, and the coming year is no different. We will always be looking for opportunities to enhance our capacity to serve and to do more to ensure that the right social outreach response can attend to unsheltered people in place of the police when no crime has occurred.

New Program Manager

The end of 2022 saw the change in the program Manager. The former manager had been a Volunteer in the program at its inception, and then worked for three years in the capacity of Program Manager. With the new manager in place, we expect that there will be new opportunities and ideas for enhancement of the program as those new ideas are explored and implemented.

The Watch Observe and Serve



Two or more Patrol Teams -Patrol Area 1, Patrol Area 2, Patrol Area 3, Patrol Area 4
 Warm days when Parks are busy, shift to patrol the parks a couple of times.

The Watch Monthly Statistics														
2022														
Month	Volunteer Hours	Average Monthly Volunteer Hours	Number of Volunteers	LPS 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	424	23	10	9	0	860	45	20	1	30	105	7	18
2	Feb	358	23	4	4	1	822	21	25	1	28	89	2	21
3	Mar	344	21	6	6	0	850	35	29	2	28	96	3	31
4	Apr	408	25	6	3	0	897	55	26	0	24	84	1	26
5	May	408	21	8	1	0	1010	40	30	1	40	131	0	40
6	Jun	366	21	8	3	0	1004	45	26	2	25	120	1	32
7	Jul	336	21	8	2	0	1092	44	29	2	22	163	2	46
8	Aug	432	26	14	9	0	1015	34	47	2	39	188	3	65
9	Sep	456	25	5	5	0	793	31	43	1	26	163	1	40
10	Oct	400	21	11	7	0	863	31	58	3	20	140	4	25
11	Nov	372	20	5	5	1	805	19	49	4	40	81	3	21
12	Dec	272	20	2	6	0	696	36	44	2	16	39	4	27
Month Average		381.33	22.25											
YTD Totals		4576		87	60	2	10707	436	426	21	338	1399	31	392
Total Events YTD		11282		0.8%	0.5%		95%	3.9%	3.8%					
* Included in All Public Service														
LPS Events		Includes Assult, 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.												
Narcans Used		Any instance when any Narcans is provided.												
Transportation		Any time Transportation is arranged by DOT, Streets Alive or SAGE Clan is accessed												
Needle P/U		Any time improperly discarded needles are located and ARCHES needle pick up is accessed.												
2023-01-23														