

# The Watch – 2021 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.

The Watch acts as the eyes and ears of social and community services agencies as well as our emergency service providers. 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 Naloxone 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. It is not uncommon for a volunteer to walk in excess of 10 kilometers in a four hour shift interacting with, and serving, the community.

### **Human Resources**

The Watch provided a total of 4152 hours of service in 2021, operating daily from 10:00 am until 10:00 pm. Throughout the year The Watch averaged 25 volunteers per month, with a total of 4483 volunteer hours provided with a monthly average of 373 volunteer hours. 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. Watch Teams are

always comprised of at least one Volunteer and one Team Lead, however with an average of only 25 volunteers, there are many times when teams are comprised of two Team Leads at minimum. With a maximum four team leads working every day, there are times when only two of the five patrol areas we have are covered which are in our primary areas 1 and 2, with some attention paid to area 3.

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 2021 there were three groups of Volunteers and Team Leads recruited and hired. They completed the required Basic Watch Course held in February, March and September. 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.

### **Uniforms**

This year The Watch team changed colour of their uniform. The black cargo pants that the team was wearing were too closely associated to those worn by law enforcement officers and they were seen by many in the community as too over bearing. With the annual uniform issue to our existing teams, and for all new teams starting with our first training class in February, khaki coloured cargo pants replaced the previous black ones. Replacing uniform pants in this way allowed us to manage costs, while making the change and ensuring uniforms look professional. The Watch retained the familiar and easily identified high visibility red shirts and jackets, and in the summer months a khaki coloured uniform cargo short pant was adopted for all team members who wished to wear them.

### **Operational Priorities**

The operational priority of The Watch is to enhance safety in the downtown, and manage some of the events that people would call the police for, in spite of there not really being a requirement for police to attend and do anything. The negative behaviours that give rise to people calling the police are usually more annoying, unsightly or inconvenient than they are unlawful. Over the past three years of operations, calls requiring police involvement by The Watch has fallen from 24% of 1411 in 2019, to 1.2% of 6517 in 2021. As the teams get more experienced, efficient and effective at managing issues without the police when they are not really required, capacity is created for the police to be doing the

things that require a police presence. Not everything that The Watch does would have required police, 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.

The Watch teams continue to build relationships and embrace all of our stakeholders and partners in our operations. This includes the vulnerable population of homeless and addicted people, regardless of their ancestry, as well as other public and private service providers. This is in addition to the downtown business owners, people who work, visit and shop downtown and our emergency service providers.

### **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 homeless and addicted populations. The Watch works with nearly two dozen 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 homeless 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 has also been able to build relationships with local regional treatment facilities which allows our Team Leads to advocate for addicted people who ask for it and assist with intake and arranging transportation to a particular facility where a vacancy has been located. In 2021 The Watch has completed intakes on behalf 16 people to allow them to access detox and treatment from one of the southern Alberta detox and treatment centres.

### **Working with the Police**

As stated, one of the primary goals of The Watch is to manage issues that were historically left for the police, in spite of the reality that there is not really a role for them. Doing this allows police officers to have capacity to deal with the core police functions of crime and safety, rather than managing this kind of matters and providing social supports which can utilize police time.

In 2021, there were more than 400 phone calls directly to The Watch asking for support and service in managing such things as negative behaviors, repeated crime occurring or other assistance. This is more

than double the number of calls received last year. These are calls that did not go to the PSCC and require a police officer to be dispatched to the location.

In 2021 Watch teams managed more than 6500 actions and events with 80 of those requiring the police to become involved. Compared to the 161 where police were involved in just over 3950 calls the previous year, many of these calls were made on behalf of a person who was the victim of a crime, to assist a person requiring police service or to assist police in locating a person who they were looking for as a witness or a person of interest in a police investigation. In many of the matters attended to by members of The Watch, they can detect an issue that would historically have resulted in someone calling the police. However, when the Watch detects an issue, in most of the cases, they can deal with it preemptively by accessing proper services other than law enforcement when law enforcement is not necessary.

The Watch also receives information from police officers in and assists in locating a person who may be a witness or suspect that needs to be spoken with by the officer. Through this, many investigative hours searching for a person who is known to The Watch have been saved in the past year.

Lastly, the Watch has also been able to help locate and conclude missing person cases on behalf of the police service. This happens when the team has become aware of a report of a missing person, and comes into contact with the person in question, or knows of their whereabouts and is able to confirm. Families are notified and police files are managed on behalf of the initial investigating officer. This is also true of found identification and financial cards where The Watch is able to match the found documents to a crime, such as a car prowling, or report lost property to the owner and manage the return without involving a police officer.

### **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 2021 these checks were carried out 369 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 naloxone spray and carry two 4 mg single dose spray devices with them while on duty. In 2021 there were 47 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 2021 Watch Teams administered 76 doses of Narcan during these 47 events, and assisted other people in dealing with a further 11 overdose incidents. In comparison, 2020 saw Watch Teams attend to 38 overdose casualties and use 70 doses of nasal Narcan.

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 105 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 1160 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 409 occasions in 2021. 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 2021 Watch cellular phones were used by people without a telephone or access to one on 356 occasions to make calls to friends and family or to reach out to contact a support service or worker.

### **Going Forward in 2022**

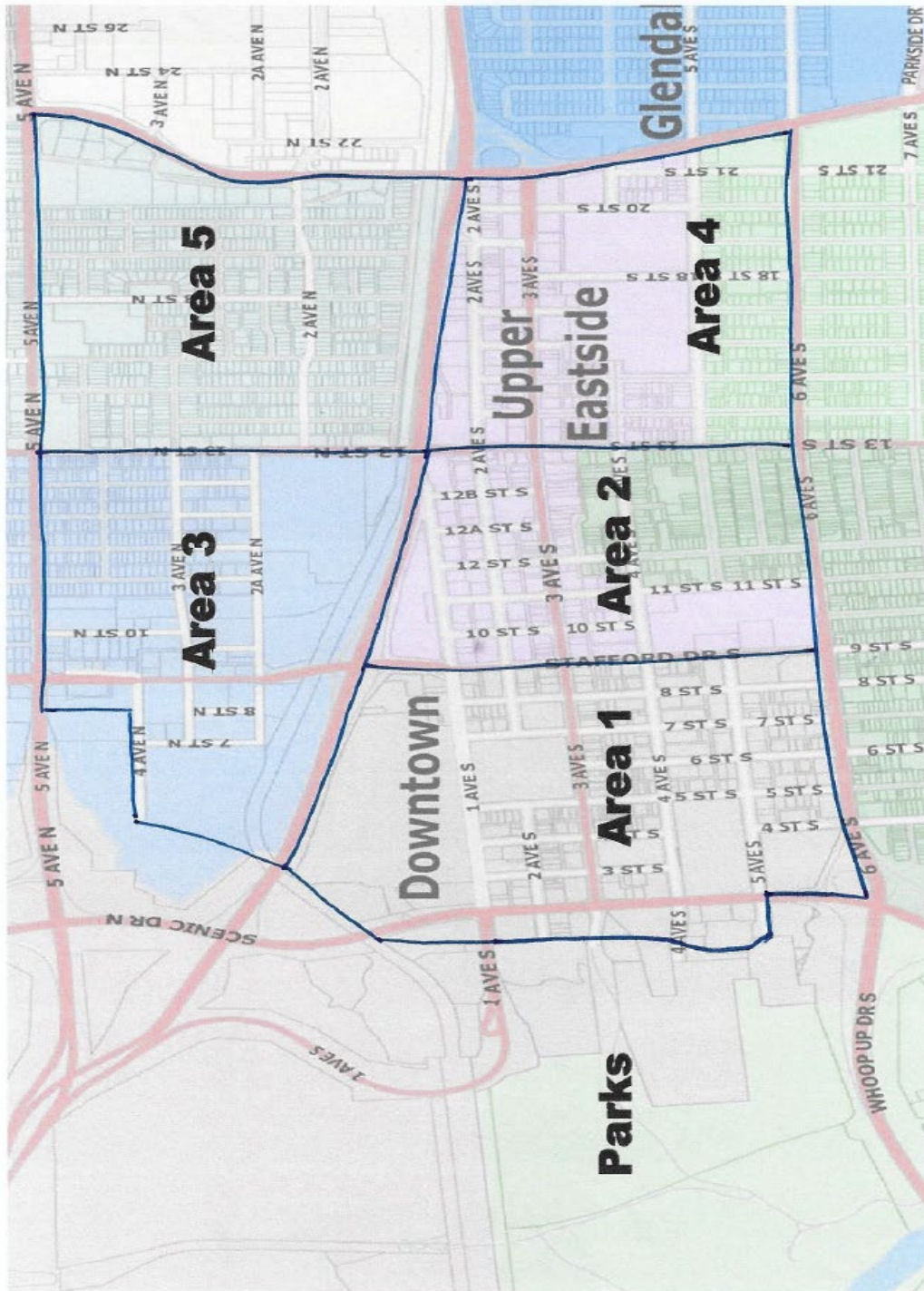
In the coming year we will continue to examine our deployment from a strategic point of view, having consideration for our busiest times, days and locations, as well as types of engagements we deal with.

In addition we will use and share activities and previous trends with our Team Leads for patrol planning and making decisions on where and when we carry out undirected preventative activity in our work area.

Also, in the coming months we will work on developing a comprehensive job description and hiring strategy to replace the Program Manager at the end of the year. As we look for new leadership to continue to develop and grow the program and examine how it serves the community, it will be important to find the right person, with the right skillset to be able to facilitate a seamless transition. The future success of the program will require an evaluation of how to develop the program in such a way that The Watch will grow and succeed in delivering service in support of the police and the community over the coming years.



## Watch Patrol Areas



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														
2021														
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	Narcan Used Events	Phone Calls Walk Phone
Jan	324		23	9	3	1	540	14	6	0	15	134	2	33
Feb	308		23	4	6	0	539	12	6	1	22	64	3	11
Mar	432		33	8	15	1	662	49	9	0	50	106	7	48
Apr	412		25	3	6	0	558	28	6	0	31	91	2	19
May	284		25	6	3	0	324	14	7	0	29	65	1	11
Jun	436		25	12	11	0	433	29	7	6	44	92	5	49
Jul	383		24	3	10	0	313	37	7	2	47	78	3	34
Aug	380		24	9	7	0	308	41	1	1	34	98	5	60
Sep	308		27	14	9	0	471	44	8	4	31	132	7	44
Oct	416		24	6	8	0	752	50	13	0	44	134	6	42
Nov	384		24	5	3	0	660	31	9	2	25	103	2	44
Dec	416		23	1	6	0	683	20	26	0	37	69	4	14
Month Average		373.58	25.00											
YTD Totals	4483			80	87	2	6243	369	105	16	409	1166	47	409
								5.9%						
Total Events YTD	6517			1.2%	1.3%		96%	5.7%	1.6%					
* 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.													
Narcan Used	Any instance when any Narcan is provided.													
Transportation	Any time Transportation is arranged by DOT, Streets Alive or SAGE Clan/Diversion Outreach Team is accessed													
Needle P/U	Any time improperly discarded needles are located and ARCHES needle pick up is accessed.													
2022-01-23														