

The Watch – 2020

“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 and our emergency service providers. They also 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 nearly 9 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 4236 hours of service in the past year, operating from 10:00 am until 10:00 pm every day, except for observed holidays. Throughout the year The Watch averaged 25 volunteers per month, and a total of 3442 hours of volunteer service. That equates to an average of 286 volunteer hours per month, and includes nearly two and a half months where we had to suspend our volunteers as we entered the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 leader on the team, competent and well

trained employee Team Leads are critical to delivering service of The Watch. Enhanced Field Training Officer Training was provided to Team Leads enabling them to provide critical feedback and record performance of their new trainees. This also encourages succession planning and growth within The Watch program.

With an average of 25 volunteers per month, there are many times when Team Leads are the only resource available on the street. With a maximum four team leads working every day, there are times when only two of the five patrol areas we have are covered. The Watch will never field a patrol team with less than two persons on it. Volunteers are required to provide 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 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. This requirement is potentially an obstacle in attracting volunteer applicants who are older and perhaps not working toward a career in policing.

With five patrol areas that need to be covered by a Team Lead and Volunteer at minimum, there is availability for four volunteers for each of the three daily shifts to staff four of the five patrol areas every day. There are 4260 shifts available for volunteers to cover every year, and with the requirement for each volunteer to cover one four hour shift every week, we would need 82 volunteers just to cover the downtown Beat 10 area. With the average of 25 volunteers that we have had every month, each volunteer would have to increase their attendance to cover four shifts per week, which is a big ask even for the two or three of our most frequent volunteers, who provide two shifts per week on average.

In 2020 there were two groups of Volunteers and Team Leads recruited and hired. They completed the required Basic Watch Course in February and in July. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted both hiring processes, but there were 10 Volunteers and eight Team Leads who successfully completed the week-long 24 hour course over four evenings and a Saturday. 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.

COVID-19

Operations of The Watch were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as we had to exclude our volunteers from operations from late March until mid-June. The Watch continued service with a smaller Watch Team, and minimized exposure to the Service for anyone who may inadvertently introduce the virus into the building. The Watch has adopted all of the recommended AHS protocols to limit risk in the police building and on the street as we interact with the community. All members wear masks for the entire duration of their shifts and maintain social distancing. Hand sanitizer, protective gloves and hand

washing, where facilities exist, are staples of The Watch. This also includes the daily sanitizing of radios, cellular phones, office space, and The Watch truck. Watch members self-screen before they start their shift, and they screen those they interact with on the street. In cold and flu season, Volunteers and Team Leads have been careful to monitor any symptoms which are common to COVID. In all cases when we have our team members disclose when they detect symptoms, they stay away from their shifts and attend for symptomatic testing as directed by Alberta Health Services. The Watch has had to run short-handed at times, but we have not had any positive test results and have had our people return to work quickly once symptoms have subsided.

Operational Priorities

In 2020, the watch had redirected priorities to better focus operations in support of the community and the police service. While The Watch acts as ambassadors of the downtown, and works to enhance the perception of safety in the downtown, the way in which The Watch works to achieve that has been adjusted. The Watch works to manage incidents and events that historically were left for the police to manage in spite of the fact that they usually do not involve behaviours that are criminal, a public safety risk or anything that the police really need to be involved in. The negative behaviours that give rise to people calling the police are usually more annoying, unsightly or inconvenient than they are unlawful.

The first step in achieving this goal was 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, and 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.

Radio Communications

In the past year, The Watch built a greater partnership with the Public Safety Communications Centre, where a Communications Specialist was assigned to monitor a radio channel assigned specifically for the use of The Watch. Radio Protocols were developed to permit Watch Team Leads to use their radios to book out at specific locations. This is to record activities and events in CAD, and record locations for safety in the event of members of The Watch becoming involved in an emergent situation requiring assistance.

Statistical Data Collection

The Watch was able to obtain analytical support in the police service to run a pilot project where the data captured in CAD could be extracted and utilized to analyze operation. Previously Team Leads were required to complete large manual statistical collection reports for their shifts every week, and rely on manual counts for statistical reporting. Once the pertinent data was identified, a comparative analysis was conducted between the data captured in CAD and the data that was recorded manually. As soon as a standard of reliability and consistency was established between the two data sources to ensure accuracy, the data collection tool was moved to CAD for 2021. We are now able to utilize the data

captured in CAD to examine location, date, time and activity types with confidence and are able to strategically look at our business and where we do it.

Partnerships

Partnerships with government departments, and private not for profit service providers have been 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 is working with twelve private partner agencies and Alberta government agencies 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.

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 transportation to a particular facility where a vacancy has been located. In 2020 The Watch has completed intakes on behalf three people in order to allow them to access treatment from one of the six southern Alberta centers.

The program manager has become involved with three committees related to social issues in the downtown, and they routinely reach out to connect with partner agencies and stakeholders. These are opportunities to work with, and build relationships with the service providers and businesses in our community. It helps our team understand what is available in our community and develop strategies to mitigate the issues that arise from negative behaviours and crime.

Working with the Police

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 being inundated with these matters and providing social supports that can quickly utilize police time.

In 2020, there were 191 phone calls directly to The Watch asking for support and service in managing such things as negative behaviors, repeated crime occurring or other assistance. These are calls that did not go to the PSCC and require a police officer to be dispatched to the location. This year members of The Watch conducted over 3900 actions and incident responses, and only involved the police in 4% of those. In many cases where the police did become involved, it was because the person with whom The Watch was dealing was a victim of a crime. That is in contrast to the previous year where The Watch had 1411 actions and incident responses and involved the police in 24% of those. In many cases, members of The Watch are able to detect an issue that would normally have resulted in someone calling the police. When the Watch detects an issue, in many cases they deal with it preemptively by accessing necessary services other than law enforcement.

The Watch also takes information from police officers in the patrol section, violent crimes section and downtown beat, as well as Community Peace Officers, 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 successfully 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 on patrol members of the Watch are required to check on any person whom they find who is either apparently in distress, or they appear to be unconscious or unresponsive. In 2020 these checks were carried out 732 times, with some of these checks resulting in the detection of someone who was suffering from an opioid overdose, or some other medical issue requiring attention. 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 brand naloxone spray and carry two 4 mg single dose spray devices with them while on patrol. In 2020 there were 38 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 2020 The Watch used 70 doses of nasal Narcan spray in these situations.

In addition, there were 70 other instances where a person who was being checked on and was found to be in need of 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 123 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 927 such needles located and properly disposed of by our partners after being notified by a Watch patrol.

Other Activities

In the community people are in need of 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 and occasionally through one of our other partners on 494 occasions in 2020. 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.

Going Forward 2021

There was a lot of effort put into The Watch by the Team Leads and Volunteers as the program evolved and grew. The Watch service expanded to provide a variety of additional supports and service connections in 2020. New processes and practices were identified and included in The Watch service delivery model to make the program more efficient and connected with the people they serve. Recognizing stakeholders and clients and identifying services to support them all have helped The Watch carry out their mandate and increased their community profile. This, in turn, supports the police in creating capacity for them to carry out more of the core policing functions that the community requires. In the coming year The Watch will undergo some changes in uniform and focus on expanding the number of volunteers. Opportunities to engage the community even more, to have a satellite office and build on the relationships that were developed in 2020 will be capitalized upon. The next year will be an opportunity to ensure the work that was carried out in support of the Watch Team bears fruit in the way it was intended and improvements that can be made are done. There will be a reexamination of deployment strategy, hours of service and shifting in 2021.

The Watch Monthly Statistics												
2020												
Month	Volunteer Hours	Average Monthly Volunteer Hours	Number of Volunteers	LPS Events	EMS Events	Fire Events	All Public Service	Wellness Checks	Safe Walks	DOT	Needle Pick Up	Narcan Use
Jan	424		26	26	2	1	106	35	12	34	33	0
Feb	330		28	13	1	0	75	25	13	37	34	0
Mar	306		27	13	4	0	72	29	8	38	53	1
Apr	0		25	11	8	1	145	67	7	2	73	2
May	0		24	23	5	0	359	120	9	59	107	2
Jun	128		22	15	6	0	344	111	13	62	69	4
Jul	340		26	9	10	0	378	118	12	67	67	7
Aug	370		26	14	13	0	462	79	11	47	98	11
Sep	384		25	9	5	0	363	32	5	45	68	3
Oct	416		25	8	8	0	453	45	17	44	58	2
Nov	396		25	9	3	0	369	36	11	39	97	2
Dec	348		24	11	5	0	469	35	5	20	170	4
Month Average		286.83	25.25									
YTD Totals	3442			161	70	2	3595	732	123	494	927	38
Total Events	3951			4%	2%		91%	20%	3%			
								19%				
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.											
DOT	Any time Diversion Outreach Team is accessed											
ARCHES	Any time improperly discarded needles are located and ARCHES needle pick up is accessed.											
2021-01-22												