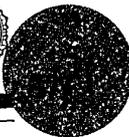


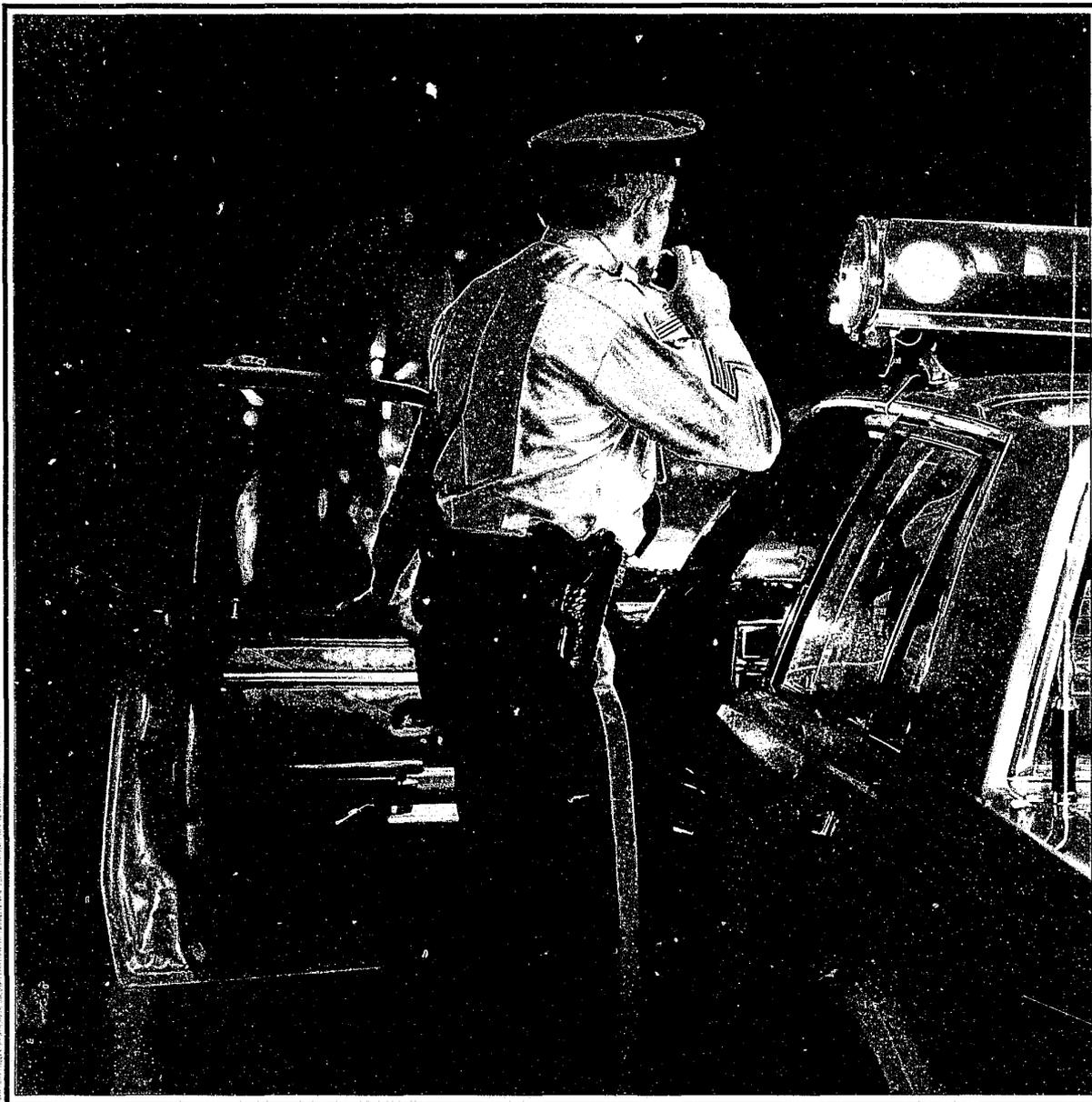
U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation



AUGUST 1995

# FBI Law Enforcement

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## Communication Security



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# Volunteers Help Shoulder the Load

By  
ROBERT J. LIDDELL



**V**olunteers have assisted law enforcement agencies for many years. Traditionally, however, departments limit volunteers mainly to clerical roles and other activities not requiring direct contact with the public. Some agencies use reserve officer programs to supplement their sworn services, and a few departments have expanded the use of volunteers into nontraditional areas. The Lakewood, Colorado, Police Department has developed three innovative programs that use volunteers in the areas of enforcement, investigation, and initial services.

Lakewood, a suburb of Denver, is a mixture of urban and suburban areas experiencing most of the law enforcement problems common to a large metropolitan area. Reported crimes continue to rise, gang violence plagues the city, resources are stagnant or have risen at a slower rate than the increase in demands for service, and State tax limitation legislation has restricted the city's ability to raise needed revenue. Faced with these problems, the Lakewood Police Department chose to use volunteers in the Victim Assistance, Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication, and Civilian Surveillance programs.

Before the programs could be implemented, however, administrators had to lay the groundwork within the department.

## GETTING STARTED

Expanding the use of citizen volunteers presented three significant challenges—selection, training, and supervision. The sensitive nature of the programs required that the department identify willing, interested, and suitable citizen volunteers. Once selected, volunteers had to learn how to perform their duties safely and correctly. Finally, a system of supervision and accountability had to be established within each

program to ensure that the volunteers performed effectively and within established guidelines.

### Selection

Administrators designed a rigorous selection process to screen out unsuitable applicants and to ensure that volunteers could perform their duties effectively. Volunteers for these programs must be recommended by either a member of the department or by a graduate of the Citizen Police Academy.<sup>1</sup> They then undergo additional screening, including an interview conducted by the department's command staff.

When citizens volunteer for one of the programs, the department conducts a thorough background investigation, which includes a polygraph examination. Education, experience, and an oral interview also serve as selection criteria for the volunteer crisis counselors in the victim assistance program. The volunteers do not begin providing service until

they have completed additional program-specific training.

### Training

#### *Surveillance*

Training for members of the Volunteer Surveillance Team covers such topics as the elements of crimes, observation perception, parking enforcement, note-taking, gang activity, drug trafficking, and radio use and procedures. They practice observing a location, documenting their observations, and reporting any criminal behavior to dispatchers. All members of the surveillance team must complete training at the Citizen Police Academy before they begin their assignments.

#### *Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication*

Similarly, members of the Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication Team learn how to recognize

and identify gang graffiti, as well as how to distinguish between gang and tagger graffiti. Tagger graffiti is not painted by gangs marking their territory. Rather, most taggers do it either as a form of so-called artistic expression or simply as an act of vandalism. Some taggers may spray paint their monikers to gain the attention of gang leaders in an effort to enhance their chances of becoming gang members.

The graffiti enforcement team focuses mainly on gang-related graffiti. To document these crimes, team members learn to use camera equipment and to write accurate reports. Volunteers must understand the elements of gang graffiti crimes and probable cause. These volunteers also serve on the surveillance team, so they receive training in surveillance techniques, as well.

#### *Victim Assistance*

Volunteer crisis counselors complete training in the areas of victimization and grief counseling. They also receive an extensive review of operating policies and procedures for the Lakewood Police Department. Following their classroom training, volunteers spend 2 to 6 weeks, depending on their prior experience, riding with a professional victim advocate employed by the city. At the end of the ride-along period, if they receive positive written evaluations from the victim advocate, the volunteers are ready for their assignments.

#### Supervision

All three programs have clear lines of command and supervision. Volunteers work closely with sworn



Lieutenant Liddell supervises the Patrol Division of the City of Lakewood, Colorado, Police Department.

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**The volunteers  
augment the sworn  
police force and  
enable department  
administrators to  
expand services  
within the confines of  
a restricted budget.**

”

personnel and must follow strict guidelines for action. Volunteers who exceed their authority or otherwise neglect to follow the rules are dismissed from their respective programs.

#### *Surveillance*

The lieutenant in charge of the department's Personnel Services Section serves as the contact person for all citizen volunteers and oversees the Volunteer Surveillance Team. The lieutenant or commander of the Administrative Services Division must approve deployment of the team at the request of one of the operational section commanders. The requesting commander then handles all aspects of the team's deployment, including acquiring necessary equipment, briefing and debriefing the team, and completing after-action reports.

#### *Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication*

The Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication Team reports directly to the sergeant in charge of the Gang Unit. As reports of gang graffiti come into the department, the sergeant reviews them and assigns volunteers to photograph the graffiti. The sergeant ensures that the team follows up with a written report and notifies the property owners to clean up the graffiti.

#### *Victim Assistance*

Similarly, the coordinator for the Victim/Witness Program within the Crimes Against Persons Section supervises the Victim Assistance team. In fact, the department's Victim/Witness Program consists of only two full-time employees; all

other members are volunteers. The volunteer crisis counselors work only on weekends to respond to scenes of violence or other trauma and to handle death notifications. The commanding officer at any incident can request assistance from the crisis counselors, who then report to that commander for briefing on the situation.

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***The Volunteer Surveillance Team...focuses on preventing crime and helping to identify violators.***

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#### **LAKWOOD'S PROGRAMS IN ACTION**

##### **Volunteer Surveillance Team**

The Volunteer Surveillance Team works on nonhazardous projects designed to solve specific problems in the community. It focuses on preventing crime and helping to identify violators.

A planned schedule of deployment, based on the needs of the department, determines when and where the surveillance team will operate. On the day of any planned detail, team members meet for a briefing on what to expect. At the conclusion of each detail, the operational section commander conducts a debriefing session.

The department deploys volunteers in two-person teams that work out of a vehicle equipped with a portable police radio. They observe locations where criminal behavior is likely to occur, document their observations, and immediately report any criminal behavior to the police dispatcher. If members become important witnesses to a crime and/or arrest, they are included in all police reports as such. Additionally, the volunteers ride along with officers in police vehicles. During ride-alongs, the volunteers serve only as additional lookouts.

Regulations prohibit Volunteer Surveillance Team members from engaging in confrontations, pursuits, or arrests of suspects. They must dress neatly and conservatively. Team members are told not to discuss operations with unauthorized persons and to maintain the strict confidentiality of information learned through surveillance operations.

Regulations also prohibit team members from carrying weapons, such as guns, knives, batons, saps, or tasers—or any other type of police equipment, including handcuffs—without specific prior approval. Chemical defense sprays may be carried only by volunteers who have completed training in the proper use of the agent. Any volunteer who has consumed alcoholic beverages within the previous 8 hours may not participate in surveillance activity.

##### **Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication Team**

When the police department receives a complaint concerning gang graffiti, the supervisor of the Gang

Enforcement Unit reviews it to determine if it can be handled by the volunteers. If so, the volunteers go out to photograph the scene and complete an investigative report. To effect the eradication aspect of the program, volunteers then notify the property owners to clean up the graffiti.

If a particular pattern is noted or a suspect developed, the volunteers may be assigned to engage in surveillance activities to try to identify a suspect or to catch a suspect committing criminal activity. The volunteers do not have arrest powers, so they must notify sworn personnel when an arrest situation arises or when contact with a potential suspect is required.

#### **Victim Assistance Program**

The Victim Assistance Program provides a vital service to the department and the community.

Volunteer crisis intervention counselors respond to the scene of violent or otherwise traumatic incidents to help victims and their families cope with the aftermath. The volunteers can help calm the victims and thus free sworn officers to carry out their other duties.

These volunteers work in two-person teams, patrolling the city in unmarked police vehicles on weekend nights—periods of high criminal activity. Having such a mobile crisis intervention unit increases the availability of victim assistance services throughout the city and reduces the crisis counseling response time. The team members monitor the police radio and respond to calls that seem likely to require or to benefit from their assistance. Any police unit also may request the team's services.

The mobile unit is never the first unit from the police department to arrive at the scene of an incident.

Instead, the unit responds to the area and awaits notification that the situation has stabilized. The team then contacts the officer in command of the incident to advise that the crisis unit is in the area and available to assist.

Upon arrival at the scene, crisis volunteers first must contact sworn personnel for a briefing. The volunteers also must notify sworn personnel of any evidence observed or pertinent information obtained while at the scene. At the conclusion of the incident, the victim assistance volunteers prepare a written report of their activities at the scene.

#### **EVALUATION**

At the conclusion of each detail, the operational commander or the program supervisor conducts a thorough debriefing. This provides volunteers with an opportunity to receive feedback on their performance, to evaluate what occurred, to raise concerns, and to discuss ways to improve.

After-action reports also provide administrators with written documentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the volunteer programs. Prepared by the operations commander and forwarded to the lieutenant in charge of personnel services, these reports are compiled for review by the chief of police and his command staff. The department also conducts annual program evaluations. These regular evaluations help to determine whether the volunteer programs need to be modified, expanded, or even discontinued. Careful periodic review enables the volunteers to perform successfully and helps the programs to meet the



**“Volunteer crisis counselors complete training in the areas of victimization and grief counseling.”**

needs of the department, the community, and the volunteers.

## **BENEFITS**

The Lakewood Police Department's volunteer programs have demonstrated the advantages of the police working with citizens to solve community problems. The volunteers augment the sworn police force and enable department administrators to expand services within the confines of a restricted budget.

### **Volunteer Surveillance Team**

The Volunteer Surveillance Team has helped make the community safer for all citizens. For example, a neighborhood house occupied by an elderly couple is believed by local teenagers to be haunted. In the past, the couple's home has been vandalized during the weeks preceding Halloween. In 1994, however, the Volunteer Surveillance Team kept watch over the home in October. The team spotted several groups of mischievous teens around the house, and police intervened before any damage was done. The Volunteer Surveillance Team's work prevented the home from being vandalized and sent a strong message to local teenagers that such behavior will not be tolerated in the community.

### **Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication Team**

The work of the Gang Graffiti Enforcement and Eradication Team has saved the department a substantial sum of money and addressed a problem that, due to scarce resources, would otherwise be relegated to the bottom of the work pile. For

example, in the 7 months from April through October 1994, volunteers spent 92 hours taking 392 reports, which saved the department nearly \$1,800 (based on the mid-range salary of a sworn officer).

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***The volunteers have provided officers with greater flexibility to meet enforcement duties and responsibilities.***

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### **Victim Assistance Program**

On February 5, 1994, while on routine patrol, the Victim Assistance Mobile Unit responded to the location of a drive-by shooting. There, volunteers found paramedics loading a juvenile male into an ambulance. He had been shot twice. Officers asked the volunteers to notify the victim's parents and accompany them to the hospital.

The volunteer crisis counselors explained to the parents what had happened, assisted police officers with their interviews, and acted as a bridge between the parents and the detectives. The parents had prior contact with the department regarding their son's affiliation with gangs, and the relationship between the parents and the detectives was initially very hostile. The volunteers calmed the situation and established an environment that enabled medical personnel to perform their

duties and detectives to conduct a thorough investigation. In addition, as victim advocates, the volunteers aided the victim and his family in obtaining further counseling and other services to help them cope with the incident.

## **CONCLUSION**

The joint efforts of the volunteers and the sworn officers have helped prevent crime in the city. The volunteers have provided officers with greater flexibility to meet enforcement duties and responsibilities. Officers can focus on tasks requiring their special skills and training, while the volunteers handle some of the more routine functions and service activities. Lakewood's experience shows that with dedication, creativity, and effort, volunteer programs can be designed to provide tremendous benefits to their communities.

The Lakewood Police Department is committed to expanding its volunteer programs, particularly in the area of victim assistance. Continued innovation and a willingness to experiment should bring additional successes in the future—a future filled with opportunities for citizen involvement in assuring a high quality of life in the community. ♦

### **Endnote**

The 9-week Citizen Police Academy educates community members about various aspects of policing, such as basic law, patrol procedures, drugs, vice investigations, SWAT, K-9, officer survival, firearms, arrest control, and building searches. The academy helps create a deeper understanding of the department's mission and role in the community, and alumni often return to assist the department in one of the volunteer programs.