

You Are Not Alone: A Law Enforcement Approach to Monitoring the Needs of Vulnerable Citizens

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello, I'm Jennifer Donelan, and welcome to *The Beat*. Today, we're learning about the YANA program, that's Y-A-N-A. It originates out of Paradise Valley, Arizona. YANA stands for "You Are Not Alone," and it's a program to assist individuals with limited mobility, disabilities, or other circumstances, who would benefit from having someone check on their welfare daily. With us, you're going to be hearing from two individuals. You're going to first hear from Officer Steven McGhee, he's the Community Resource Officer for the town of Paradise Valley in Arizona. He's worked in law enforcement for seven years. He acts as a liaison between the police department and the community by supervising special programs and services to their residents. And after we speak with Officer Steven McGhee, who you're going to learn likes to be called by his first name, Steven, we are then going to hear from a police volunteer, Patricia Wagner. Now, she's one of the original police volunteers in the town of Paradise Valley. Patricia's a volunteer trainer and she's the regional volunteer who oversees day-to-day activities of the You Are Not Alone program. Again, we're going to hear from her a little bit later, but we are going to start with Steven. Steven, welcome to *The Beat*.

Officer Steven McGhee

01:27

Thank you for having me.

Donelan

01:28

Absolutely. So, let's start with why you go by your first name.

McGhee

01:32

So, in the town of Paradise Valley, there's a local feel. It's very familiar. You know your residents. And officers, rather than using the formal title of "Officer," we go by our first names.

Donelan

01:44

Is that a problem with a common name, name like Steven?

McGhee

01:47

It can be. Steven is a very common name in the town of Paradise Valley. There was actually a call for service where my supervisor and another officer, we all had the same first name, so in meeting the resident, she wanted to thank us for coming out, so she asked for our first names, who we were. And the first officer says, "I'm Steven." The next one turns to her and says, "I'm Steven." And she turns to me and goes, "Let me guess, your name's Steven, too." And I said, "It is." So, she thought we were playing a joke, but no. We're all Steven, and we go by first names in our town.

Donelan

02:16

And I know that this is about the You Are Not Alone, but I want to stick with this, one more question about the first name. Because that's not something you hear often. Normally, we address our law enforcement officers by "Officer McGhee," "Sergeant McGhee," "Lieutenant McGhee." Why has that been so important for you guys, and what's been the payoff with that?

McGhee

02:33

I think for us, it allows us to really build relationships with our community. We're on a first-name basis so when we're talking with our residents, especially with programs like YANA, they treat us like family and we treat them like family.

Donelan

02:48

Wonderful. Okay. Let's first of all set the scene. I've never been to Paradise Valley, Arizona. We've got people listening from across the country. Could you describe Paradise Valley, Arizona, to our listeners?

McGhee

02:59

The town of Paradise Valley is a small town. It's nestled right in between Scottsdale and Phoenix. It's predominantly residential. It has different resorts there. It has places of worship. It's spotted with schools, golf courses, and medical plazas. However, we don't have a gas station, and we don't have a grocery store, either.

Donelan

03:18

So do you travel for Scottsdale for that?

McGhee

03:20

Yeah, even for the officers, sometimes even to get food. We have to travel outside of our area, or we bring it with us. So, to get gas, we'll travel right to our border area and we'll fill up our gas for our vehicles.

Donelan

03:32

Well, that area of the country is absolutely gorgeous. Let's talk about YANA, You Are Not Alone, the acronym Y-A-N-A, what is it?

McGhee

03:42

So, YANA is a program that's designed . . . it's free for our residents and it's in order to help save lives and help individuals who might have limited mobility, disability, or other circumstances that would benefit from having somebody check on their daily welfare. The goal of YANA is to help individual members feel confident while continuing to live on their own.

Donelan

04:00

Steven, and I'm going to get used to calling you by your first name, tell me exactly what YANA is. You Are Not Alone. I understand it's daily phone calls?

McGhee

04:09

Yeah. It's an automated system that we've selected a service provider to call our residents. They push "1" to indicate that they're okay, or they push "3" to say that they're not okay and they need police assistance. If they don't answer, the system automatically gives them two additional calls through a limited time, and if they still don't answer, that's when the police dispatch gets a notification that there might be something wrong. Our dispatchers give them another call. If they still don't answer, they try their secondary phone numbers. Still no answer, they send an officer out there to do a welfare check of the residence.

At that time, the officer again will try all the different numbers that are available to try to make contact with that resident. And our residents, they choose what time they're getting this call, so it's expected. They're able to call themselves in if they're going to have an appointment, or if they have other things going on. So, at that point, we have reason to believe that this person may be inside the residence, if they're not answering the calls, and so at that point the officers have access to the house through a kind of like a safe box outside the house, where they can then gain entry into the house. They make announcements, and they look to do a welfare check on that resident.

Donelan

05:18

So, this is literally someone who lives by themselves, who may have limited mobility, doesn't necessarily mean that they're a member of the elderly community, and this is someone who, if they opt into this program, someone's going to be checking on them. And you have, it sounds like a number of safeguards, right? They have the ability to call in and say, "Hey, you know, I have a doctor's appointment. My call's

normally scheduled for 9 a.m. I'm not going to be home." And so, therefore, you guys would know, hey, this person's not answering the phone, but we know they're at the doctor's. And then that sort of avoids the false alarms, I would assume. How do residents get involved in this?

McGhee

05:54

Our residents are able to reach out to me directly to see if the program is a right fit for them. And it's not always somebody who might be living alone, but maybe they're living with someone and, because of their circumstances, they could feel alone. I'll give you a couple examples of that. For a bit of time, we had a mother and daughter. They were enrolled inside of our program. The mother was aging gracefully, and the daughter was undergoing cancer treatment. The mother said, you know, "If something happens to me, I want to make sure my daughter's taken care of, and that she gets checked on." And the daughter says, "If something happened to me, I want to make sure that you're taken care of!" So, they ended up joining in the program, and it was a benefit there.

We've also had situations where husband and wife, the wife had some type of cognitive disability. Or, another situation where a wife was severely depressed. And in both of those situations, the husband said, "If something happens to me, I want to make sure that my wife is taken care of, and that somebody does check on her because she might be inside the bedroom just sitting there. No one would know that she's home because she doesn't interact with anybody else."

Donelan

06:58

Let me ask you, because, you know, this brings up a bunch of questions on how to implement something like this. So let's start with, for you, population of Paradise Valley, and how many people do you have signed up for the program right now? Key point being this is voluntary, correct?

McGhee

07:13

Correct. So, population-wise, we're estimated to have about 16,000 individuals, and our program right now has about 20 active members. However, there's approximately 20 people who are kind of pending, who we follow up with every couple months to see if they're interested in joining or not. And sometimes people say they want to join, other times they decline. And we're about 20 people strong right now.

Donelan

07:37

So tell me about how YANA saved a woman's life.

McGhee

07:41

Yeah. We had the program established, and somebody was a little bit hesitant about joining. She does everything on her own, she goes to the store, she goes on walks every single day. However, she was living alone. Her family and friends were urging her to join the program, because family wasn't living

local, but they were made aware of the program through friends. And the program is voluntary, so she ends up joining the program. And within about two weeks she ends up having an incident where I myself respond. And we use a safe box in the front of the house, which has a key, where we're able to access the individual's house, where we did a welfare check on her. She wasn't answering the phone calls that gets every single day, and she wasn't answering the door when we attempted to make contact. We had reason to believe that she was inside, and she was. We end up having to call medical personnel to come respond, because she was semiconscious, laying on the ground. She ended up getting transported, and the doctor had disclosed that, had she not been transported, due to complications, she likely would have passed away. And she did end up recovering, and about two weeks after being admitted to the hospital, she was released and back at home.

And so it kind of goes to show that the success of the program ended up working exactly how it was supposed to. She wasn't alone, she had this reassurance in knowing that somebody would come check on her. And had we not been there, it might have been days before anybody would have come to see her. And because we were able to be there as fast as we were, she was able to have a faster recovery and get back home.

Donelan

09:10

This is what it is and here's how it helped. Do you think that communities could look at implementing something like this? Now, and, I think we maybe need to get a little more into the nuts and bolts of how it operates, so before we answer that question, tell me about how those calls are made. Who makes that daily phone call?

McGhee

09:26

So the call is an automated system that gives this call. So, once it's plugged into the system and the time is selected by the resident, that call goes every single day at that designated time to that resident. It comes in within about a seven-minute range due to the volume of calls being placed. And the resident, again, pushes "1" if they're okay, they push "3" if they need help. And it is an automated system that does those initial calls.

If the calls are not accepted, the follow-up response would be our dispatcher, the person behind the computer who gets a notification that the call hasn't been acknowledged. And so they then manually reach out to that resident to see if they're okay. They use backup phone numbers to see if they're able to reach that person, and if not, they do send an officer out.

Donelan

10:12

So, minus the instances when they don't answer the phone, is there any other part of this program? Is it just the daily, automated phone calls? Are there weekly visits by officers?

McGhee

10:22

So, every single week one of our police volunteers, Patricia, she does call all of our residents who would like a call. And so once a week, they call the residents to see if they want a weekly visit. We do those on Wednesdays. And then on Wednesdays they go out and visit the different residents. And that's beneficial also, because sometimes when you have that communication with those residents, you can see subtle changes, whether it be health or because now you have this relationship and you've seen these people every single week, or maybe once a month, you're building these relationships where they do end up sharing things that we're able to connect them with resources. Or there could be criminal things that are happening that we can be that resource to them to help them so that way they're not getting scammed. That's a primary thing, there.

Donelan

11:08

Looking at it from an operational point of view, right, from 35,000 feet above, right now I'm hearing automated phone calls, I'm hearing really heavily, you know, volunteer involvement is key to this.

McGhee

11:08

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Donelan

11:19

But in terms of police resources, so far, it's only when the alarms sound that officers are needing to go. So from, you know, if I'm a chief of a department, and I'm looking at my resources and saying this sounds like a great program, but we don't have the resources for it—it sounds like it's doable.

McGhee

11:37

Yeah, we've incorporated different components to it. So, the volunteer part of having the weekly visits and calls, that's not a required element of it. I think if you focus on the core aspect of having a daily wellness call and providing that care, it depends on how many people you have enrolled in the program, which would change the price. If you have huge volumes, you could cut down on the price by purchasing your own type of software. If you have a relatively small amount of people, I think per person it comes out to about \$15 a month to check on their welfare. And then we do end up installing a safety box, and that can range somewhere between \$250 to \$300 per person. And we cover this expense for those people because the cost to be able to provide that for them, definitely there's a huge benefit there that we see for our residents. And so, counsel has justified the cost and allowed us to have a budget to provide this program.

Donelan

12:33

Wow. So yeah, so when you're looking at a larger scale, a larger community, you're saying that there are ways you can tailor to make this work. So, in terms of the brainchild of this, you found the program, you saw the need, they found the program, and then you kind of look at what's out there and figure out what would best serve your need, the size of your community.

McGhee

12:33

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Donelan

12:52

And the needs of your individual community. Talking about the volunteers, are the volunteers that you're using, are they police volunteers? Are they screened, background check, et cetera?

McGhee

13:02

Our volunteers, most of them, are residents of our town. And we have a police volunteer program. And so, the volunteers do go through background screenings, a formal interview process. They're selected to become police volunteers, and then some of them take on specialty positions, like Patricia with our YANA program.

Donelan

13:22

Because the weekly visits, I can understand where that's just this added benefit, right, of being able to reach out and touch someone beyond just the daily phone calls. If a department was looking to stand up a volunteer corps, to manage something like this, is there training that you offer to yours that are involved with YANA?

McGhee

13:39

Yeah. So, it's interesting, when we started developing the program, we didn't realize what type of needs might exist for that program. And so, when we started seeing the interactions that the volunteers were having, I wanted to start providing them with the training to be able to see what signs of dementia might look like. Or, what signs of stroke would be like. So as different training opportunities exist, or are shown in the community, I start to assign the volunteers to attend these trainings, that way they can bring back that knowledge to have that awareness when they're interacting with somebody that, maybe this person is having early signs of dementia. And then they know.

And that's important because if somebody in the future were to go into, for example, a transitional care facility, one care facility is going to be a little bit different if they deal with somebody who has dementia versus somebody who doesn't. And you don't want to have them placed in the wrong location. And so,

being able to have training like that for our volunteers, we've connected them with that so we can be that resource to help guide the families if there's something that we're seeing happen with that person in our YANA program.

Donelan

14:48

Are there any other challenges that you've faced with this program? Privacy, for instance. You know, for the police department to be able to have access to a key to get into a residence. Did you have to kind of legalize that and go over that with the city attorneys? Is there any issue about security for your volunteers who are doing the weekly visits? What would be potential challenges that you would advise another agency, "Hey, keep this in mind when you're thinking about this, you could come across this, and here's a way to potentially deal with it"?

McGhee

15:17

That's a great question. And, so, to answer the first part, there are some privacy concerns. The person is releasing sometimes medical information over to you. And when people are living alone, that's not something . . . If an officer or someone's responding out to a call like that, you don't want to voice that over the radio because now all of a sudden people who maybe are scanning the radio might hear that this person's living alone at this address. So we don't voice YANA calls over the radio.

When our volunteers are going out to a YANA call, they log it in on the computer so they are made aware of where they're going. As far as consent in entering the residences, that's all provided to us. Within our application that we have, we kind of detail different things, that we're only going in there to do a welfare check. And to prevent us from having to break down a door or a window to do that welfare check, we do have what is available called . . . it's a safe box. And that safe box is only used by paramedics, first responders, the firefighters. We have a key that is unique to our town that accesses that box, and we're the only people who have that key. And so, as far as privacy concerns of going into the residence, it's only to do that welfare check.

And then when our police volunteers are doing the weekly visits, they never do it one-on-one. They always have a second volunteer there with them when they're doing those visits, so there's a witness to whatever's said, or what's happening there.

Donelan

16:40

Makes a lot of sense to me. This does seem like a great answer to the question of how do we best serve our community, right?

McGhee

16:40

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Donelan

16:50

How do we serve our elderly? How do we serve those who are alone, who are in need of assistance? How do we even know that they're out there, and how do we make them feel safe? And this program seems to answer a lot of that. What would be some final words you would share with our listeners in terms of if they'd be thinking about something like this? Like, what's the payoff?

McGhee

17:08

Yeah. So, when you think about the different calls that an officer might be on, we're exposed to sometimes the worst of the worst. And, for us, sometimes it's a blessing to be able to be there for someone when they need someone. For example, with these programs, we might be going to a medical call where somebody's just passed away, and we now we discover that that spouse is living alone. They don't have anybody else there. We might be called out to somebody who has a question on how to . . . they need a citizen assist. And then we discover that this person has mobility issues, that there's some other type of circumstance that they would benefit from having a welfare check.

This particular program is right in between some of the social services that might be available that maybe don't exist in an area of town, where it would fill that void to be able to help people who need that welfare check. And, when you think of a program that you could start that would have the opportunity to save someone's life, this is it.

Donelan

18:05

Hey, Steven, I know that there are going to be people that have questions and want to learn more about the program. What's the best way for them to reach you or to learn about the program?

McGhee

18:14

Absolutely. So, my contact information as well as descriptions of the program are on our website, and you can search that and go under "Police services" to find You Are Not Alone. Our website is www.paradisevalleypd.com, that's W-W-W-dot-P-A-R-A-D-I-S-E-V-A-L-L-E-Y-P-D-dot-com. And, again, it's under "Police services," You Are Not Alone.

Donelan

18:42

Wonderful, Steven, we are actually going to switch gears and we are going to go and talk now to Patricia Wagner. Thank you so much for joining us.

McGhee

18:50

Absolutely, thank you for having me.

Donelan

18:51

Okay. We've now heard from law enforcement. What I'd like to do is take this to a real-world application and talk to one of the volunteers that's actually been involved with this program. Her name is Patricia Wagner, she has been a volunteer, a police volunteer, but a volunteer for 16 years in Paradise Valley. And I'd like to thank you for joining our program, virtually. Patricia, let's start off with why you became a volunteer, and I understand it has something to do with September 11th, 2001.

Patricia Wagner

19:22

That's right. On September 11th, it got me thinking that I needed to get back into volunteering, which is something I always did but then I had children, and I stopped for a while. But that really just hit the spot and I thought, "I need to get back in." I saw an article in the town of Paradise Valley paper, that they had a program that they were just starting for volunteering with the police department. And I thought, well that was something that I had never done before. So I thought I'd try, and I called up, I set up an interview, and I was accepted and that was 16 years ago.

Donelan

19:56

Wow. That it is amazing. Now let's turn our focus to YANA, You Are Not Alone program. I mean, that's something very special to you, why did you feel that your community needed a program like this? What unmet needs, for instance, did you see, and why did you get involved with this program?

Wagner

20:14

Okay, well, when I first started with the program, I used to just patrol and do vacation watches with my volunteer partner. And I noticed that a lot of older residents were in our community. And it started me wondering that if these elderly people are alone, who was watching over them? What if they fell in their yard or their home, you know, who would help them? And would they know what to do? So I decided to look at other communities around the country, to see what types of programs they have for their elderly residents. I took the information that I gathered, and I met with the Chief and the Community Resource Officer at that time, and we sat down and we came up with what we thought would work best in Paradise Valley, and that's how YANA was born.

Donelan

20:55

Wow! I mean, that is really dedicated and really innovative. So, what impacts have you seen since the program was started?

Wagner

21:04

Well, I'd say that the impact that I see most is that the residents, it makes them feel more secure. It gives them more confidence, I think, to live on their own, to be able to live at their house by themselves. I don't think they worry so much about not getting help if they fall. And, you know, it just makes them feel good to know that somebody cares about them. And I have to say, we truly do care about them. And we've become extensions of their family, and they've become extensions of ours. And it really works out well.

Donelan

21:34

That is so rewarding. Also, too, let's talk about this a little bit, you know, the very tragic scenarios involving elder abuse. Have you seen this program help avert cases of elder abuse?

Wagner

21:47

One that I can think of off my hand, is there was an older gentleman, and he's in the program, and he got a scam call about sending money to get his grandson out of jail in a foreign country. Sure, we've all had those calls. And he was very worried about it and upset, and he was worried what would happen to his grandson if he didn't send the money. Well, because of our relationship with him through the YANA program, he confided in us, and he asked for advice. So we explained it to him that it's a scam, and then we let the police know about the situation and they came back and talked to him further. And he was very relieved, and very glad that he didn't fall for it and send money. So it turned out very well, and when we told the police about it they came, like I said, came by, talked to him, and explained the situation.

Donelan

22:36

Disaster, true disaster, averted. I mean, you've seen cases where people's life savings are just completely wiped out by these predators. How rewarding has this been for you? And for those who are listening, who are thinking about, you know, they've learned about it, they're hearing about this potentially for the first time, and they're contemplating maybe implementing something like this—what words of encouragement would you have? And, again, going back to my first question, what have you found so rewarding about it?

Wagner

23:02

Well, I think that any town or city that wants to start it would really be helpful to the elderly people. And it's not just the elderly people, it's just people in general who need help. And, you know, in our town, it's mostly the elderly people. But, you know, it goes beyond that. One thing about our program, and that

the people love so much about it, and I have to say they really love our police officers here, but one of the nice things about our program, it's tailored to meet the individual needs of our residents. Like, I'll give you an example, if that's okay.

Donelan

23:34

Yes.

Wagner

23:34

A couple examples. On Tuesday I call all the YANA residents, and we set up weekly Wednesday meetings. So, my partner, Judy Chervenak, and I have been doing this for three and a half years, and we set up the meetings, and we go out and visit the people on Wednesdays. They also get to pick the time of day that they want their daily calls to come in. If they have an emergency and are taken to a hospital, I'm notified, and then either Judy or I or both of us will go down to the hospital to be with them. As you know, it's very traumatic to go an emergency room in the first place, but especially so if you're elderly and alone. So it really helps for us to be down there. We try to stay down there with them in the emergency room until their contact shows up, you know, their emergency contact.

When they come home from the hospital, we generally bring them flowers. And if they're sick, I'll call them a couple times, you know, extra times, to make sure that they're okay. And on their birthday, I call them and wish them a happy birthday. So it's a very tailored program to each individual person. And as far as me, I really enjoy being around older people, and I love to hear their stories and just being around them. And so, I get as much out of it as they do. And I think Judy's the same way. She enjoys the people as much as I do.

Donelan

24:51

That it is absolutely wonderful, Patricia. For an agency that might be thinking about starting something like this, and they engage in volunteers to participate along with them, if anybody wanted to reach out to you to ask questions, being that this was, you know, one of your ideas and you've been a part, such an integral part of this and have so much knowledge on this, could they contact you? And, if so, how would they contact you?

Wagner

25:16

They'd have to go through Steven, who's our Community Resource Officer.

Donelan

25:20

All right, well, I'll give Steven's email.

Wagner

25:22

Yeah.

Donelan

25:22

And I'll make sure that everybody knows to reach out to Steven if you want to talk to Patricia Wagner. Patricia, I can't thank you enough to discuss this program.

Wagner

25:31

Well, thank you. Can I add one more thing? I want to tell you about the security feeling that we give to the people because of the daily calls. And I just thought that this is a really nice example of it. We have a 98-year-old woman, she's blind, and she lives by herself. And she gets her calls every day at nine o'clock in the morning. Well, one morning she got up and she fell. She didn't hurt herself, but she couldn't get up by herself, and she couldn't reach the phone to call for help. So after not answering her daily calls the police showed up, they let themselves into her house using the key that is in the security box, and they found her on her bedroom floor, they helped her up, they stayed with her a bit, and then they left.

So the next day, when Judy and I went to visit her, we asked her if she got scared when she fell. And she said, "No, not at all." She goes, she knew if she didn't answer her morning call, the police would come, find her, and help her. So she wasn't worried at all. And she was so grateful for the program and she loves our police. So, I thought that's a really nice story to show about the security that the program . . .

Donelan

26:35

That's a beautiful story. It gives them such a sense of peace and safety and comfort. And there's not enough money in the world that can buy somebody that. Just a simple phone call knowing, "Hey, if I don't pick up, someone's coming."

Wagner

26:46

Mm-hmm. [affirmative] That's right.

Donelan

26:46

That's phenomenal. Patricia, thank you so much for joining us, and thank you for all the work that you're doing. And I hope that this catches on like wildfire.

Wagner

26:55

Well, I hope so. And I really appreciate the interview.

Donelan

26:58

Well, our sincere thanks goes out to Steven McGhee and Patricia Wagner for joining us on this episode of *The Beat*. It was fantastic learning about the You Are Not Alone program. Thank you for joining us, and be safe out there.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

27:11

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

28:10

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