



## Guardian Angels Opening a Chapter

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### Interactivism

The Guardian Angels do not invade cities. They do not set up shop in a vacuum and expect everyone to take them or leave them. The key to successfully solving community problems is to get as many members of that community involved and cooperating. In some instances, the Guardian Angels can act as a hub through which a community's divergent groups interact. In some cases, these groups may have problems working with each other. The Guardian Angels can act as a go-between or neutral party.

People are familiar with the term activist. It means a person who is involved in some action for some cause. Usually, most activists simply conform to their own agenda and mission. In many cases this approach works. These days, however, you need to network and cooperate to gain greater returns. In fact, the very act of networking and cooperating usually solves the problem by itself. The Guardian Angels use a term called "Interactivism." We are all activists, but we believe that our goal is not only to help solve problems for the community; it is also getting the community more involved in solving its own problems. We strive to diligently work with all the community elements to orchestrate a united front of good will and problem solving.

### Organizing the Elements of a Community:

- ★ Police, Highway, and Sheriff's Department
- ★ Police Commissioners
- ★ City and District Attorney's Offices
- ★ Elected Mayor, Council members, County Supervisors
- ★ Public Transit Agencies
- ★ Government Services and Agencies
- ★ Neighborhood Councils or Advisory Groups
- ★ Neighborhood Watches
- ★ Churches
- ★ Community Organizations (Coalitions, Associations, Clubs)
- ★ Non-profit Organizations (Local and National)
- ★ Businesses and Business Associations (Chamber of Commerce)
- ★ Retail
- ★ Corporations
- ★ Residents
- ★ Schools and Colleges

- ★ Libraries
- ★ Youth and Teenage Services
- ★ Newspaper, Television, and Radio News Media

## **Step 1: Contact the Guardian Angels**

A chapter is usually started when someone calls the Guardian Angels about a problem in their community. If the community is located near another Guardian Angels chapter, the nearby chapter will act as a liaison in helping to open the chapter, recruit, and train members. If the community is not located near another chapter, that individual may have to visit the nearest chapter for training. If possible, the Guardian Angels may be able to send someone out to open the chapter and train all the locals. The Guardian Angels always try to turn residents into leaders of their own chapter. The residents know their community the best. Oftentimes locals are put off by outsiders coming into their communities and applying methods or tactics that may not work in their communities.

The process of opening a chapter is not instantaneous and easy. The last thing anyone wants is a chapter quickly opening and then quickly closing. Communities will simply be turned off by the Guardian Angels and may become even more close-minded to new solutions. We want to build solid chapters with solid foundations. We want to make sure that the leader of the chapter is trainable, honest, dependable, level headed, and persistent. Usually, if a resident is impatient about getting a chapter started, he is likely to be impatient when he does not see immediate results. Helping to build communities takes patience and persistence. There are countless obstacles and adversities. Above all, a Chapter Leader must have the ability to handle pressure and overcome adversities.

### **First Contacts**

If you are training someone to start a new chapter, the most important quality to look for is dependability. Do they show up on time? Do they call you as promised? Did they clip crime-related articles in the newspaper? Did they set up a meeting with the local police department? Sometimes, you will get a recruit who wants to do everything all at once. Sometimes, they are just looking for another thrill ride or “flavor of the month.” Of course, some thrill seekers may well end up settling down and realizing the other benefits of the Guardian Angels.

The other two main character traits are persistence and responsibility. How well does this person take setbacks and adversity? Is he patient? Does he easily become frustrated by the lack of recruits? Does he complain about no one helping him?

While we like to teach recruits about the value of dependability, persistence, and responsibility, a Chapter Leader in training must already exhibit these qualities. The Chapter Leader will be the main contact for all other recruits, and he must set the example for them. When people join, when they think of the Guardian Angels, they will think of him.

## **Step 2: Reconnaissance & Research**

The Guardian Angels will attempt to personally meet the resident and members of the community. A Road Team will both drive and walk around with the resident to assess the type, scope, and intensity of the problem. They will also be able to assess how the local residents feel about the Guardian Angels.

Every community is unique, and the Road Team must realize this. Their job is twofold. They must educate everyone about what the Guardian Angels are all about, but they must also try to get an education about what the community is all about. Do not rely only on the one contact. Try to talk with as many people as possible. They may inform you about special laws and regulations, relevant political issues, histories, recent issues, etc. Also, use the Internet. To start with, visit the City and Police Department web sites.

For instance, a reconnaissance of Los Angeles led to the following information: There was a recent scandal with the LAPD Rampart Division in addition to a long history of problems between the LAPD and minorities. In 1992 the city erupted in a riot after white LAPD officers were acquitted of beating Rodney King, a black motorist. Also, recently, the new Mayor replaced a black Police Chief with a white one. The white one came from New York City where he was already familiar with the Guardian Angels. There has also been a consent decree that mandates that the LAPD develop more responsive community relations. Each division is divided into patrol areas each with a Senior Lead Officer (SLO). The SLO is the community liaison and handles any complaint or issue related to that area. The LAPD also holds monthly community meetings for each division.

The City of Los Angeles has also developed neighborhood councils within each Council district. These councils are comprised of both city employees and volunteers who provide advice and direction for their City Councils. The City of Los Angeles is also facing a budget crisis that may mean less government services and a smaller police budget resulting in fewer resources to handle crime and cleaning neighborhoods.

Contact with former Los Angeles members also provide valuable information about past chapters, tactics, and performance or problems.

## **Step 3: Proposal**

All good plans start with a good, well-defined proposal. A proposal in its most basic form first defines a problem or need. It then proposes a plan of how to solve that problem or need. Then it explains how to measure the fulfillment of that need or solution of that problem.

For example: 1. There has been a surge in gang and drug activity in Neighborhood A. This activity has become increasingly violent, and several innocent people have been attacked or robbed. 2. A Guardian Angels chapter will be established to start patrolling the neighborhood. The Chapter will also try to educate youth in schools and residents about the dangers of gangs and drug use. 3. The Chapter will attempt to decrease the number of criminal activities in the neighborhood. After it has succeeded, it will continue to work with the community to prevent a recurrence of the problem by setting up youth programs and regular patrols.

## Step 4: Introduction to the Community

Write introductory letters in the following order to the:

- ★ Police department
- ★ Sheriff's department
- ★ Mayor's office
- ★ City Councilperson's office
- ★ County Supervisor's office
- ★ Chamber of Commerce
- ★ Neighborhood business associations
- ★ Community groups
- ★ Any large complex you patrol (e.g., malls)
- ★ Public transit agency
- ★ County school district
- ★ Youth and teen services
  
- ★ Universities and colleges



New Chapter in Hollywood, CA, 2003

Try to attend neighborhood or community meetings. One of the most important relationships to develop is with the police department. The relationship should neither be too distant nor too close. The police department may want you to participate in an auxiliary volunteer program that would make you subject to their rules and regulations. The Guardian Angels is an independent volunteer organization of citizens with no special authority or powers. Our purpose is to make it easy for citizens to become involved in fighting crime. If we are part of a police run program, many people may not want to join.

It is, however, appropriate to have a police contact and provide her with reports on your patrols, activities, and objectives. It is not appropriate to provide her with a list of members and their application information. Applicant information is strictly confidential and only the Chapter Leader should have access to that information. The police contact may suggest that you patrol or avoid patrolling a certain area. It is fine to consent on a specific instance. For instance, they may be doing a drug bust at a certain location, and they do not want you to spook the criminals there. Or there may be a spike in crime in on a certain block in which case, you would definitely want to concentrate patrols there. However, you cannot be told that you are forbidden from ever patrolling or that you should only patrol a certain area.

Community members and leaders may also want to use you politically. Do not be surprised if one elected official supports you as his idea and then a month later, he condemns you in the newspaper as being unnecessary and dangerous. Always try to stay positive and try to be as neutral as possible. Try to avoid becoming part of an

election campaign or part of a divisive and controversial issue. Of course, we will always support the right cause no matter how divisive or controversial it is. For instance, we will patrol areas where there has been gay-bashing. On the other hand, we try to keep away from issues like abortion.

### **Step 5: Recruitment and Training**

Start walking around areas with high pedestrian traffic. As soon as you have one recruit, start training him. The first recruits will most likely end up the leaders of the chapter. They also are naturally the kind of people to lead and take initiative. Only when you start patrolling with four or more members will you then attract the followers, people who will only get involved if they see enough people getting involved.

Try to spend most of your time either recruiting or training. Provide new recruits with as much training as possible, as they will likely end up training others.

### **Step 6: Graduation**

All new chapters are on probation. There is no guaranteed time frame for opening a chapter; however consistency, professionalism, and outstanding performance always help. A Guardian Angel from another chapter will visit to ensure that the new Chapter is following rules and regulations and conducting itself appropriately. A Regional Director or higher is the only person to authorize the graduation of a Chapter. For some chapters, it may take over a year to graduate, however, since these chapters have persisted for so long, it is no surprise that many of them are the ones still around today.



London, Canada Graduation  
2002