

crime prevention review

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CRIME PREVENTION REVIEW

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The CRIME PREVENTION REVIEW is a professional forum for the Criminal Justice System in California designed to provide discussion of varied concepts and issues of crime prevention and useful resources for the practitioner in the field.

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DENNIS KELLY

Stockton Police Department's "Senior Citizens Assistance Program"

DENNIS KELLY

Officer Dennis Kelly, Stockton Police Department, Stockton, California, began his law enforcement career with the Stockton Police Department in December 1973. He is presently assigned to the Community Relations/Crime Prevention Section and serves as co-coordinator of the "Senior Citizens Assistance Program." Officer Kelly attended San Joaquin Delta College, Stockton, and received his Administration of Justice Training at the Regional Criminal Justice Training Center in Modesto, California.

INTRODUCTION

The Stockton Police Department has implemented the "Senior Citizens Assistance Program" in an effort to address the crime prevention concerns of area senior citizens. The first class was held on February 7, 1978, and since then, over 116 senior citizens have completed the program. Each session consists of eight weeks of classroom training covering such topics as "Self-protection," "Consumer Fraud," "Mace Training," etc. Information on services available to the senior citizen through the Area Agency on Aging is also provided.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

In late 1977, the Stockton Police Department envisioned the development of a crime prevention program geared toward senior citizens. It had become evident that a definite need existed to provide area senior citizens with information on how to reduce their chances of becoming victims of crime.

Before an actual program could be implemented, however, the crime prevention concerns of the seniors had to be determined. For this purpose, an *ad hoc* committee was formed. This committee was composed of representatives from the various local senior service agencies, the chief of police, and members of the Community Relations/Crime Prevention Section of the police department who would coordinate the eventual program. The committee set about the task of soliciting information from other communities with similar programs in effect.

After much deliberation, the committee felt the following topics would be of most interest to the senior citizens of our community: "Introduction to the Criminal Justice System," "Personal Safety," "Tour of the Police Facility," "Residential Security," "The Neighborhood Watch Program," "Fraud and Bunco," "Consumer Fraud," "Social Security," and the services provided by the local Area Agency on Aging. It was decided that these topics would be covered over a period of eight weeks with the participants meeting once a

week at the police facility. Our department chose Tuesday as "class day" with classes running from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. We then set about publicizing this innovative program to the public.

Program announcement to the public

Once the planning stages of the program had been completed, it was necessary to generate interest among the local senior citizens. Press releases were prepared for distribution to the news media. Although this had some impact, it was not until the program coordinator visited various nutrition sites around the city and county that interest in the program became evident. Fliers were sent to all of the senior community centers advising them that this program was being offered by the Stockton Police Department.

Soon local interest increased and approximately thirty seniors were signed up for the first class held in February 1978. Subsequent sessions were easily filled which may probably be attributed to "word of mouth" publicity from previous participants.

Course signup

Interested seniors were encouraged to contact the Community Relations/ Crime Prevention Section by phone. To confirm their acceptance into the upcoming classes, a form letter was sent to each participant advising them of the class day, hours, location, etc. Due to our classroom limitations, each course attendance was limited to under 50 persons.

Transportation to and from class site

The Stockton Police Department provides transportation to and from the classes when necessary. Community Service Officers who are assigned to the Neighborhood Police Substations are utilized for this purpose. Community Service Officers are non-sworn, uniformed personnel who assist the department in patrol activity and the taking of reports. This transportation assignment became part of their normal duties and allows some seniors to attend who would otherwise not have been afforded the opportunity. Consideration has been given to holding the program at the local senior citizen centers but has not materialized as yet.

COURSE SCHEDULE

First Week—Introduction to the Criminal Justice System

The first class of the program begins with a welcome from the chief of police. The attendees are told what will be covered in the coming weeks and the objectives of the program. A class schedule is provided to each participant which also includes an introductory letter from the chief of police.

The first instructor is the sergeant who supervises two of our neighborhood police substations. He outlines the role of the police officer, specifically the beat officer. Most citizens, including seniors, have a somewhat distorted picture of the police due to television exposure, etc. Many times, citizens do not understand why police are unable to catch each offender when their TV heroes "always get their man." It is hoped that through this first class, the seniors will be able to relate better to the police should a need for contact

arise. They learn that a police officer is simply a human being in a uniform with all the feelings and emotions of any average person.

During the second hour of this class, the day watch commander provides an overview of the different sections and divisions which compose the police department. Each participant is provided with an organizational chart so they may visualize how each division or section interacts. This provides a better understanding of the different responsibilities of each division and may assist the senior in contacting the correct division or section when calling the police department.

Second Week—Personal Safety/Tour of the Police Facility

During the first hour of this class, the sergeant of the Community Relations/Crime Prevention Section covers self-defense for seniors and different techniques that can be used should they be confronted by an attacker. Self-defense techniques are de-emphasized as the senior could be seriously injured should he/she attempt to struggle with an attacker. More time is spent discussing common-sense prevention, such as walking in pairs, staying in lighted areas when out at night, avoiding high-risk crime areas, etc. The sergeant ends the talk with a film highlighting some of these common-sense prevention hints.

During the second class hour, attendees are provided a tour of the police facility. Community Relations/Crime Prevention Section officers conduct the tour which is on an optional basis; however, the majority of students are eager to participate. Many of the class participants have never been to a police department before and seem to enjoy the opportunity to see such points of interest as the Communications Center, Detective Division, Juvenile Bureau, Vice and Narcotics Section, Pistol Range, etc.

Third Week—Neighborhood Watch Program/Residential Security

The third week of the program begins with a crime prevention officer discussing the "Neighborhood Watch Program." Neighborhood Watch is another program offered to local citizens by the police department. It consists of organizing groups of 15-20 neighbors and then providing them with crime prevention information. During the class, a mock version of a typical Neighborhood Watch meeting is conducted. This has been a bonus, as several Neighborhood Watch groups have been established due to interest generated through the seniors program.

During the second hour of this class, another crime prevention officer is on hand to discuss locking devices. Commercial products such as deadbolts, charlie bars and window locks are displayed. The seniors are told about other less expensive ways of securing their homes which include pinning hinges and sash-type windows or placing dowels in the track of their sliding doors or windows. The seniors realize they can upgrade their home security without involving a major expenditure.

Fourth Week—Fraud and Bunco/Consumer Fraud

This class is divided between "Fraud and Bunco" and "Consumer Fraud." A sergeant from our Detective Division addresses the group on the different fraud and bunco schemes that may be perpetrated on the senior citizen.

Highlighted are "The Bank Examiner," "Pigeon Drop," "Jamaican Switch" and the "Williamson Gang." The hour is supplemented with a film on the subject of bunco. It is hoped that this exposure will help the senior to recognize a "con game" and save him/her from falling victim to a con artist.

The consumer fraud segment is taught by a deputy district attorney from the Consumer Fraud Division of the San Joaquin County District Attorney's office. The seniors are advised whom to contact should they fall victim to consumer fraud. Many of the seniors are completely unaware that an agency such as this even exists. They learn that help is available if they encounter a consumer fraud.

Fifth Week—Social Security Administration/Banking Procedures

The fifth week of the program includes a presentation by a representative from the Social Security Administration regarding Social Security laws and benefits. The seniors are made aware of what is available to them through Social Security. In fact, several seniors have been able to increase their social security benefits simply by filing their claims in a different manner. Time is allocated for the seniors to meet with the representative on a one-to-one basis.

The second hour of this class is spent with a local banker who discusses banking procedures and the handling of finances. This speaker emphasizes the importance of directly depositing savings in a bank and explains the different savings plans available. Participants are also told of the problems they may anticipate in the event of an untimely demise of their spouse and how to minimize them by making out a will.

Sixth Week—Mace Training

Chemical mace (tear gas) training is taught during the sixth week of the program. This is a four-hour class which is sanctioned through the local community college. Although this part of the program is given on an optional basis, attendance thus far has been high. This training qualifies the enrollees to apply for a mace permit and eventually carry chemical mace.

Seventh Week—Area Agency on Aging/Paramedic Program

The first hour of this class is allocated for a presentation by the local Area Agency on Aging. This segment has proved to be the most informative for many of the participants. The Area Agency on Aging offers many services that most seniors do not know are available, such as home repairs, installation of locking devices and transportation to and from the market or doctor. The Area Agency on Aging normally provides us with seven to eight speakers and each is given five to ten minutes for their presentation. Although this is not enough time to disseminate a large amount of information, the seniors do learn what is available and are able to obtain contacts should they desire further information.

The second hour includes a presentation by the Fire Department's Paramedics. Seniors are taught simple first-aid techniques, how to recognize the symptoms of a heart attack, and what to do in the event of a medical emergency. The paramedics also explain their functions in the community. We have found that the first-aid demonstrations by the paramedics are both

informative and entertaining to class participants.

Eighth Week—Review/Graduation

The eighth class of the program is a review and graduation. Class is held at the department's pistol range and training facility. The day begins with each graduate receiving a rating sheet and asked to evaluate the course instructors. In order to receive candid opinions, they need not sign their names to the sheet. After the evaluations are completed, graduation ceremonies are held. Each graduate receives a Certificate of Completion presented by the chief of police. They are also given a lapel pin bearing the logo of the program and a group photo of the class. A movie is shown followed by demonstrations of the Pistol Team, K-9 Corps, and S.W.A.T. team. Graduation day is topped off by a pot luck luncheon.

PROGRAM MAINTENANCE

The advantages to this type of program are many. The program is easy to maintain once classes have begun. No cost is involved to arrange for speakers as all are either police officers or work for service agencies that allow them to participate in the normal course of their duties. All classes are held in an area set aside for this purpose by the police department. No fee is charged for any of the classes except for the mace training and then this fee is the standard charge divided between the state and community college which provides the instructor.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

As with any crime prevention program, effectiveness is difficult to measure. Although we are unaware of any situation in which a senior has used his training to ward off an attacker or prevent a burglary, we do feel this program is of benefit to them. They are provided with information that they might otherwise not have had access to, nor known whom to contact. While we do not have tables or graphs to measure effectiveness, we do feel that if we have prevented one senior from being a crime victim, we have been 100% successful.

If you are considering implementing a program of this nature or desire further information, either write or phone the Community Relations/Crime Prevention Section, Stockton Police Department, 22 East Market Street, Stockton, CA 95202, (209) 944-8208. We will be happy to assist you in any way possible.

END