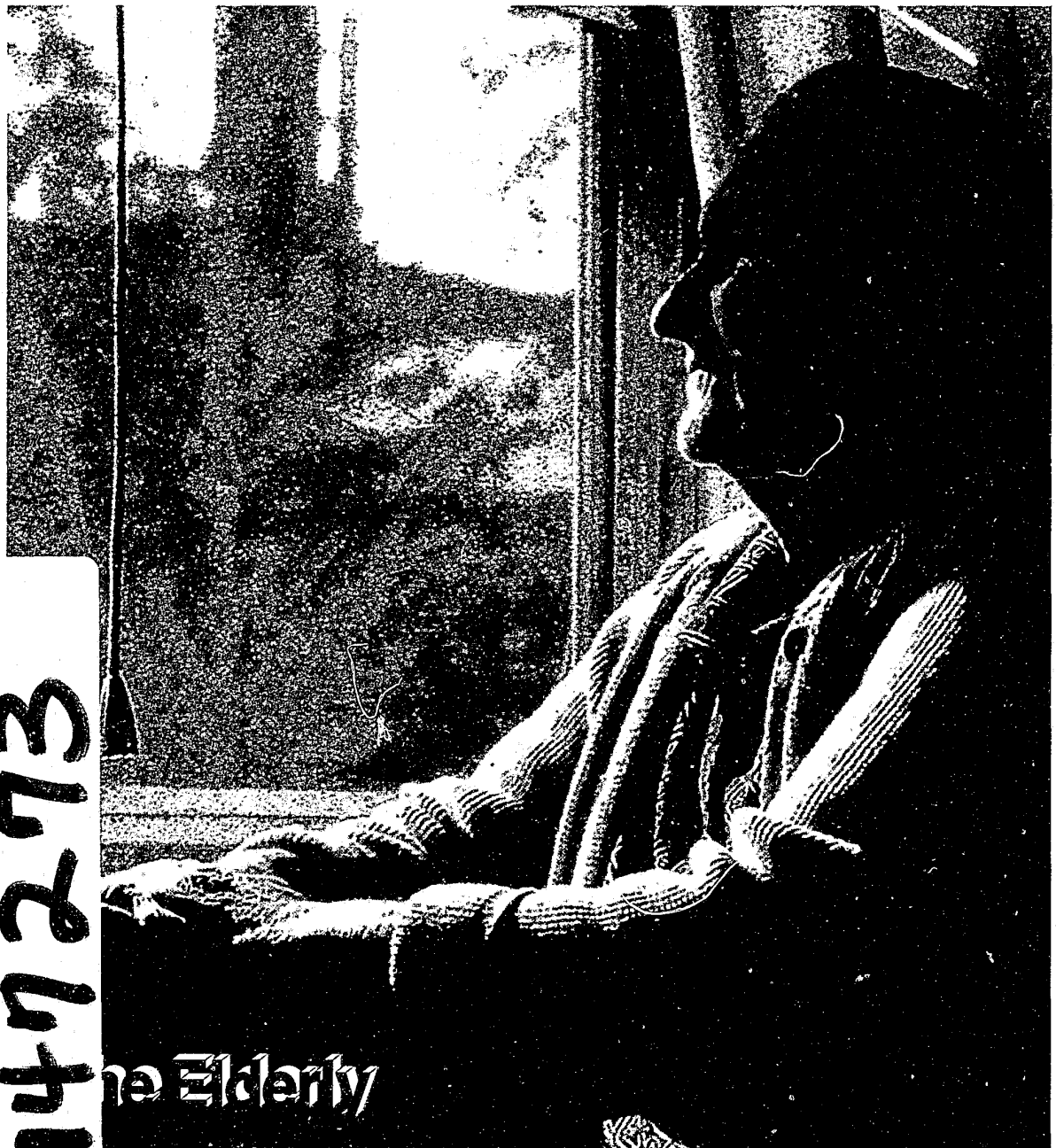


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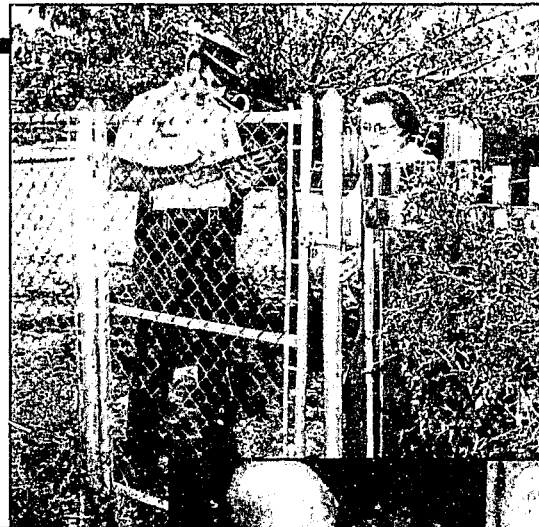
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Triad Reducing Criminal Victimization of the Elderly

By
BETSY CANTRELL



Fact: The number of older persons in the Nation continues to grow rapidly. Today, approximately one of every eight Americans faces the reality of aging.

Fact: Fear of victimization and rising crime rates rank high among the concerns of the elderly.

America's population is aging rapidly. In fact, it is projected that by the year 2030, there will be 66 million older persons in our society.¹ The increasing number of older persons in the United States, coupled with their fear of victimization, yields new problems for law enforcement.

Fortunately, however, a new concept that emphasizes community cooperation in combating these problems is succeeding in a number of areas throughout the Nation. This innovative concept is the Triad Program.

Triads are formed when the local police and sheriffs' departments agree to work cooperatively with senior citizens to prevent the

victimization of the elderly in the community. The three groups share ideas and resources to provide programs and training for vulnerable and often-fearful elderly citizens. In addition, the groups work to expand and renew interest in existing programs and develop cooperative strategies to address needs and concerns identified by older citizens.

The work of a Triad is most successful when a cooperative spirit exists between the involved law enforcement agencies and when seniors volunteer their time and expertise to help. Ideally, those involved—both law enforcement personnel and citizens—are offered training. Triads are cost-effective, but more important, they work.



Mrs. Cantrell manages the National Sheriffs' Association Triad Program.

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This article discusses the background of Triads, how they are formed, and the critical part volunteers play in the program. Finally, it discusses some of the successful programs associated with this effort.

BACKGROUND

The Triad concept emerged in 1987, when several members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) met to consider mutual crime prevention concerns and to plan for the future. The group recognized that the rapidly growing number of elderly in the United States required that the law enforcement community begin to address ways to combat the problems confronted by this segment of the population.

During this meeting, it became evident that the increasing number of elderly would lead to a growing number of victims which, in turn, would lead to a changing emphasis

for law enforcement agencies. As one law enforcement officer at the conference commented, "When the people who built the streets of America are afraid to walk those streets, something is badly wrong."

The chiefs and sheriffs who met believed it important to develop a strategy to enhance law enforcement services to older persons and to expand efforts to prevent their victimization. Further, it was clear that the problems senior citizens were encountering could best be combated through a cooperative effort between law enforcement and the senior citizen community. This effort was quickly dubbed Triad, representing the three-way cooperative effort between sheriffs, police chiefs, and the AARP, which represents the senior citizen population.

Triads combine common sense and imagination to deal jointly with unmet needs, to refer seniors to appropriate agencies and services, and to ensure that seniors know about programs available to them. In some areas, the formation

of a Triad has made the resources and program elements that were previously available to only town or county residents available to residents of both incorporated and unincorporated areas.

FORMING TRIADS

A Triad usually begins when a police chief, a sheriff, or a leader in the senior citizen community contacts the other two essential participants to discuss a combined effort. Although each entity may already have programs to reduce the victimization rate among the elderly, the three-way involvement of Triads adds strength, resources, and greater credibility.

Most Triads include representatives from agencies that serve older persons, such as the Agency on Aging, senior centers, the health department, and adult protective services. Law enforcement leaders then invite seniors and those working with the seniors to serve on an advisory council, often called Seniors and Lawmen Together (SALT).

At the initial SALT council meetings, members of the council discuss the involvement and goals of their agencies, as well as the role they hope to play with the seniors. Typically, the first task of the council is to conduct a preliminary survey to determine the needs and concerns of seniors throughout the jurisdiction.

Once established, SALT councils generally meet monthly. Police chiefs and sheriffs often join the group to hear discussions firsthand and to respond to any questions or concerns. Many times, the group's preliminary strategies focus on crime prevention and victim assis-

tance for seniors or seniors' need for security and reassurance. Strategies implemented early on are usually in response to survey results.

The SALT council is often the first collaborative effort between seniors and law enforcement. For this reason, seniors serving on the council acquire basic criminal justice information by attending a citizen police academy or rookie school to learn about the criminal justice system and the workings of the various law enforcement agencies.

TRIAD VOLUNTEERS

If the SALT council provides the starter and the fuel for Triads, older volunteers serve as the motor and wheels. Mature individuals often have the experience and skills to guide Triad endeavors. Among these volunteers may be retired teachers, truck drivers, or law enforcement officers—the volunteers represent all segments of the community.

Volunteers may staff reception desks in law enforcement agencies, present programs to senior organizations, conduct informal home security surveys, and become leaders in new or rejuvenated neighborhood watch groups. They may also provide information and support to crime victims, call citizens concerning civil warrants, or assist law enforcement agencies in maintaining records or property rooms at substations or in other areas.

Most senior volunteers derive great satisfaction from working with Triads. In fact, some volunteers enjoy their duties so much that they work as many as 40 hours a week on the various Triad programs.

TRIAD PROGRAMS

Triad programs are based on the particular needs of the involved jurisdictions. These programs may be designed to combat emerging problems, or they may be an expansion of existing programs that seem effective in reducing specific crimes.

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Training

A critical component of Triads is the training programs they offer. Most Triads offer training to law enforcement personnel, employees of local businesses, and the seniors themselves.

Law enforcement personnel

Triads train officers and deputies in issues affecting senior citizens. These issues may include the process of aging, providing effective law enforcement services to seniors, victim assistance, or disaster preparedness plans for older persons living alone.

In addition, Triads in Illinois, Rhode Island, and Ohio offer training to officers who may then be designated as elderly service officers or senior advocates. These officers work with members of social service organizations to provide better services to seniors throughout their States.

Further, some SALT councils form a subcommittee to compile a resource guide and training curriculum for law enforcement officers. The resource guide focuses on meeting the needs of seniors, while the training curriculum focuses on how to communicate with the elderly more effectively, among other issues.

Local businesses

Triads also work with employees of local businesses to help curtail specific crimes for which seniors may be targeted. For example, one SALT council in Illinois planned and helped to implement training for employees of financial institutions. This training focuses on current frauds or scams and how these crimes impact the elderly, as well as other problems relating to victimization of seniors.

Seniors

Providing expanded training to seniors is also a critical component of Triads. Triads located in Florida, Oklahoma, Virginia, Louisiana, and Massachusetts are among those that have increased the number and variety of crime prevention presentations they make to seniors.

The goal of the crime prevention presentations is to inform seniors about the crimes currently plaguing older persons and to educate them about what local crimes are likely—or unlikely—to affect them. For example, while many seniors fear violent crime, they are much more likely to become victims of frauds or scams. Triads work to provide this type of accurate crime information to seniors, helping to lessen some of their fears.

Triads not only plan programs for seniors but they also devise ways to get the same valuable information to homebound seniors. They may decide to accomplish this through outside volunteers, such as those involved in the Meals-on-Wheels Program, or by using health workers.

Elder Abuse

Some Triads establish programs to prevent elder abuse through education and to address the plight of seniors in personal care homes. For example, in Columbus, Georgia, the plight of some seniors in such facilities came to the attention of a very active SALT council. Learning that the rules and regulations governing personal care homes were not being enforced and that some older residents were suffering from abuse and neglect, the SALT

council devised a strategy to investigate specific situations.

To begin, the council enlisted the assistance of the sheriff's office and the police and health departments. Through these agencies, they obtained a search warrant of the homes, arranged for proper lodging and care for those seniors living in unhealthy and unsafe conditions, and planned for more careful monitoring of such homes. It is this type of cooperative networking that makes Triads not only successful but satisfying as well.

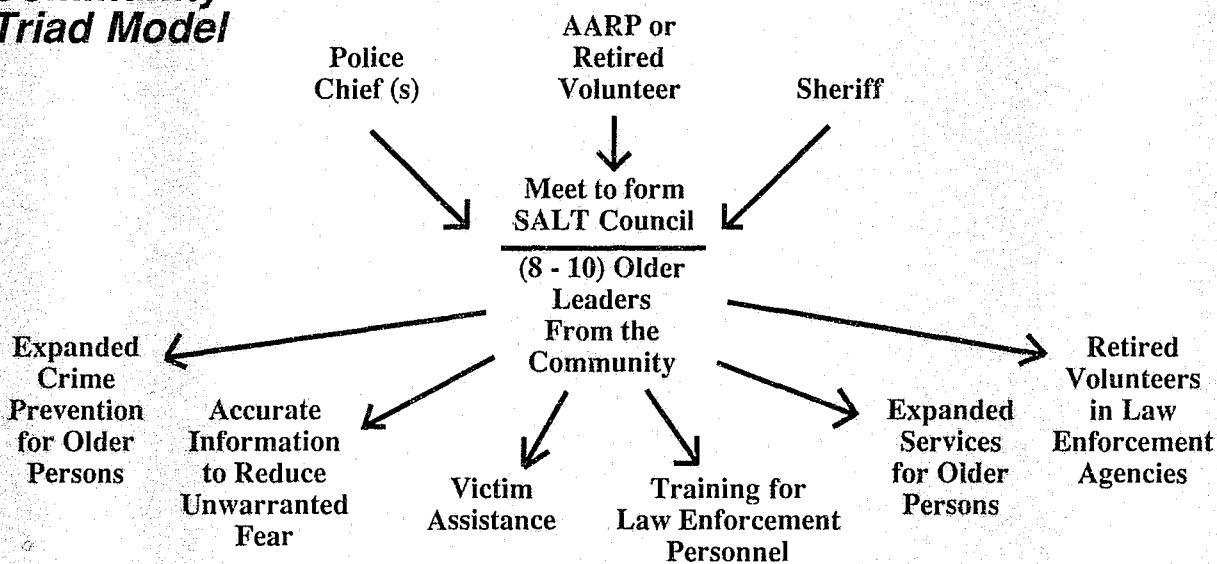
Senior Reassurance and Welfare

Some Triads design programs that offer reassurance to seniors and protect their welfare. For example, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, seniors participate in a weekly Senior Safe Walk Program sponsored by the local Triad and Project CARE, which is part of the Area Agency on Aging.

In good weather, seniors gather at the zoo, where parking and admission are free for those participating in the early morning walk. Prior to the walk, seniors hear crime prevention presentations sponsored by area agencies or businesses. The seniors may learn about safe ways to carry money and valuables, home security, or carjacking prevention. Often, the appeal of companionship and exercise draws seniors who might otherwise not hear these presentations.

Another safety program sponsored by the Bridgeport Triad helps elderly persons who reside in high-risk areas to manage their grocery shopping more safely. The Senior Safe Shopping Program involves local grocery store chains, which provide vans or buses to transport seniors on regularly scheduled shopping trips.

Community Triad Model



Telephone reassurance programs also play a part in some Triads. Older persons may fear that a fall, a stroke, or a break-in could render them unable to obtain assistance. In order to increase the seniors' sense of security, a number of Triads have begun or expanded telephone reassurance programs that already exist in some law enforcement agencies.

In Triad telephone programs, retired volunteers receive daily check-in calls from seniors or place daily calls to those who request this service. This simple program serves as a lifeline to fearful homebound persons and as a source of satisfaction to the volunteers.

CONCLUSION

The essence of Triad is cooperation. This program allows the service providers—law enforcement—to work together with the consumers—senior citizens. Through positive programs that affect safety and quality of life, mutual respect and appreciation evolves between the law enforcement community and citizens. This is, after all, what law enforcement agencies nationwide strive for—a successful program that meets the needs of all involved in the search for a safer America. ♦

Endnote

Crime and the Elderly, American Association of Retired Persons Criminal Justice Services, International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Sheriffs' Association.

For more information on Triad, contact AARP Criminal Justice Services, 601 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20003, 202-434-2222, or Triad at NSA, 1450 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, 800-424-7827.

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Format: All manuscripts should be double-spaced and typed on 8 1/2" by 11" white paper. All pages should be numbered, and three copies should be submitted for review purposes.

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Basis For Judging Manuscripts: Manuscripts are judged on the following points: Factual accuracy, style and ease of reading, structure and logical flow, length, relevance to audience, and analysis of information. Favorable consideration will generally not be given to an article that has been published previously or that is being considered for publication by another magazine. Articles that are used to advertise a product or a service will be rejected.

Query Letters: The editor suggests that authors submit a detailed one- to two-page outline before writing an article. This is intended to help authors but does not guarantee publication of the article.

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