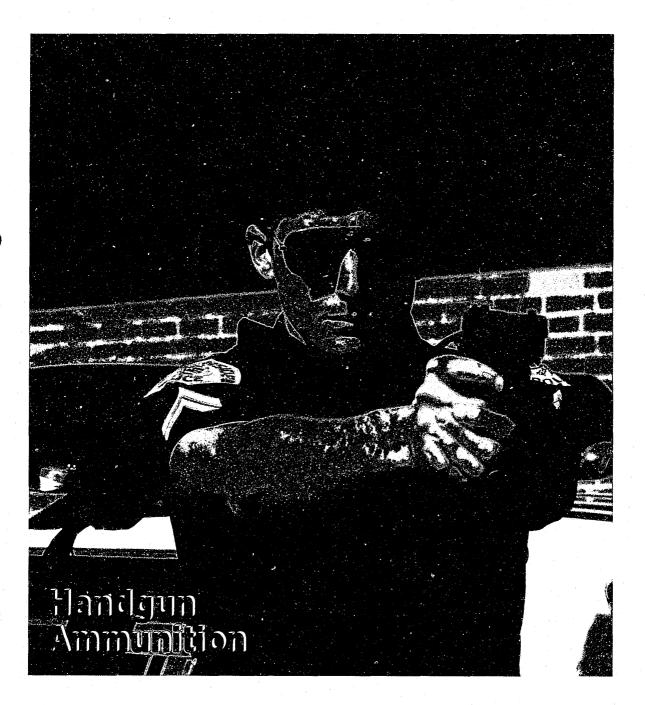
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Teaching Officers To Serve Seniors

By Glenford J. Shibley, M.A.



ost people know that Rhode Island is the smallest State. What many people do not know, however, is that Rhode Island ranks in a tie for 4th place among the 50 States in the percentage of its citizens who are 65 and older. According to Rhode Island's Department of Elderly Affairs, the State has an elderly population of approximately 150,000 individuals, or 15 percent of its total population.

Recognizing this fact, the Rhode Island Municipal Police Training Academy (RIMPTA) has made a full commitment to prepare its law enforcement officers to deal more effectively with older citizens; to understand the attitudes, capabilities, and limitations of older people; and to communicate better with this growing segment of society. Working with personnel from Criminal Justice Services for the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) in Washington, DC, RIMPTA instructors developed

Focus on Training

a training program that presents the most comprehensive and current information available.

THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The primary focus of the training program is to improve law enforcement services and to establish positive relations with the State's senior residents. Toward this goal, the curriculum was designed to address the demographics of aging; the myths and facts of aging; interaction with older persons; fear, victimization, and vulnerability to criminal activity; and fraud and confidence schemes.

Demographics of Aging

While most law enforcement officers have heard that older persons represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population, many do not understand what this means to them. RIMPTA's training covers current and projected demographic trends, the causes of these changes, and most importantly, the effects on this country and its law enforcement officers.

For example, an aging population might mean a decrease in the violent crimes usually associated with younger perpetrators. Or, there may be an increase in crimes of fraud, which often are directed at older persons. From a different perspective, law enforcement agencies might supplement their workforces with older employees, as the number of retirees increases and the available pool of young workers declines.

Myths and Facts of Aging

Many cultures honor and respect the elderly for their knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, many Americans seem to neither respect nor understand older citizens. Typical stereotypes include the elderly woman who lives with dozens of cats or the frail, senile man who spends his days in a rocking chair on the front porch of a nursing home.

While scenarios like these certainly occur, they represent a mere glimpse into the reality of modern aging. Training at the academy dispels commonly held myths, presenting factual, well-researched information in their place. It emphasizes that most of today's older residents lead healthy, independent, productive lives.

Interaction with Older Persons

Police officers need to communicate effectively with citizens of all ages. However, the aging process may affect their encounters with the elderly.

RIMPTA training introduces various situations in which an officer might need to communicate with an elderly resident. After reviewing how the aging process affects learning, vision, and hearing, the officers learn how to recognize and compensate for the different types of vision and hearing loss. Finally, the training offers advice on conducting presentations for the elderly, which officers do on a regular basis as a means of crime prevention.

Fear. Victimization, and Vulnerability to Crime

During periods of increasing crime, individuals' fears of becoming victims may escalate as well. Elderly citizens feel particularly vulnerable. When they hear or read about a crime committed against another older person, their own fears intensify. They may react by restricting their activity; some may never leave the house.

RIMPTA training in this area discusses the attitudes and behaviors of the elderly regarding their fear of crime. It covers the causes of these feelings and reviews the effects on individuals and their quality of life. Finally, it offers important information for police officers who assist older crime victims.

Fraud and Confidence Schemes

Elderly individuals often fall prey to fraud and confidence schemes. Con artists may view them as lonely, trusting, easily confused, or financially secure. If reported at all, these crimes are difficult to investigate and prosecute. Con artists, whose trademarks are mobility and anonymity, seldom leave forwarding addresses or evidence of their crimes.

This training session provides an overview of confidence schemes and frauds and details the most common. Equipped with this knowledge, officers can

teach seniors how to recognize the true nature of these crimes, as well as how to keep from falling victim to con artists.

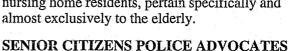
OTHER TOPICS

Training for Rhode Island's police officers is a cooperative State effort. Guest speakers from various State agencies discuss specific topics, including Alzheimer's disease, elder abuse, and housing security. These individuals also serve as contact persons to answer questions, address concerns, and offer advice.

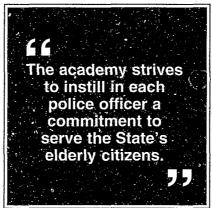
> Legal instructors at the academy teach Rhode Island General Law, which contains numerous statutes that specifically pertain to crimes committed against individuals age 60 or older. Several of these laws resulted directly from lobbying efforts by the Rhode Island Commission for the Safety and Care of the Elderly, the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, and the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association.

Another RIMPTA training session covers important legislation affecting seniors. Some

statutes cover general crimes committed against older citizens, for example, assault of an individual age 60 or over. Others, such as violation of the rights of nursing home residents, pertain specifically and almost exclusively to the elderly.



RIMPTA's training program on the elderly supports another proven success in Rhode Island—the Senior Citizens Police Advocate Program. This unique program, which was instituted in 1991, places a Senior Citizens Police Advocate in each police department in the State. These advocates, who became the first to benefit from RIMPTA's specialized training on the elderly, serve as a critical link between the police department and the seniors in the community.



RECRUIT TRAINING

After completing the specialized training program for Senior Citizens Police Advocates, the academy staff established training at the basic police recruit level. RIMPTA trains all newly hired municipal police officers in the State—except those from Providence, which has its own academy—and new

police officers from numerous State law enforcement agencies.

The academy strives to instill in each police officer a commitment to serve the State's elderly citizens. To accomplish this, RIMPTA implemented a 3-hour block of instruction in its basic police recruit curriculum. The Senior Citizens Police Advocate

Law Enforcement and Older Persons Training Curriculum

The Demographics of Aging

- Current and Projected Demographic Trends
- Causes and Effects of Demographic Changes

The Myths and Facts of Aging

- Effects of Chronological Age on Attitudes, Behaviors, and Capabilities of Adults
- · Older Individuals' Perception of Aging
- Living Arrangements
- · Physical and Mental Health Issues
- · Economic and Work Status
- Leisure Activities

Fear, Victimization, and Vulnerability to Criminal Activity

- · Fear of Crime Among the General Public
- Fear of Crime Among Older People
- Vulnerability of Older Persons to Criminal Activity
- · The Influence of Fear

- Factors Affecting Crime Stress Reactions of Older Victims
- Aid to Older Crime Victims

Communicating with Older Persons

- Communication Circumstances
- · Basic Facts
- The Aging Process and Learning
- · Vision and Hearing Loss

Fraud and Confidence Schemes

- The Success of Fraud and Confidence Schemes
- Four Elements of a Fraud Promotion
- Warning Signs of Confidence Schemes
- Person-to-Person Confidence Schemes
- · Mail Fraud
- · Telemarketing Fraud
- Attitudes and Actions Needed to Reduce Victimization

Source: American Association of Retired Persons, Criminal Justice Services, Washington, DC, 1992.

from the East Providence Police Department, assisted by a practitioner from the State's Department of Elderly Affairs, instructs the class using the most current materials from AARP.

This course represents a comprehensive but condensed version of the training received by the Senior Citizens Police Advocates. With this instruction, the academy tries to ensure that new recruits possess a fundamental knowledge of and appreciation for senior citizens.

FOLLOWUP TRAINING

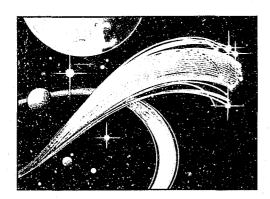
Each year, RIMPTA hosts a 1-day seminar with the Senior Citizens Police Advocates to review the year's occurrences concerning crimes against the elderly in the State. In addition, advocates share with their peers any program that has proven successful in their communities.

CONCLUSION

Every day, police officers face situations that test their knowledge and experience. Training academies set the tone for officers' encounters on the street. Without up-to-date training programs, academies fail officers and citizens, young and old. With general training for new recruits and specialized training for Senior Citizens Police Advocates, the State of Rhode Island has taken the initiative to provide its police officers with the knowledge they need to serve the State's elderly population and to enhance the quality of life for all its citizens.

Police departments desiring additional information may contact Glenford J. Shibley, Rhode Island Municipal Police Training Academy, 1762 Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln, RI 02865-4585, 401-277-3753. Mr. Shibley serves as assistant director for the Rhode Island Municipal Police Training Academy, Lincoln, Rhode Island.

Reminder



he 21st century is fast-approaching. So is the deadline to submit manuscripts for Law Enforcement's upcoming technology focus issue.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced and typed on 8 1/2- by 11-inch white paper, not to exceed 15 pages. Please number all pages and

submit three copies for review purposes. If possible, floppy disks using WordPerfect 5.1 should accompany the typed manuscript. Refer to the November 1994 issue of *Law Enforcement* for additional information.

Mail submissions, postmarked by February 1, 1995, to:

Technology Issue FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin Law Enforcement Communication Unit Madison Building, Room 209 FBI Academy Quantico, Virginia 22135

Submissions postmarked after the above date will be considered for publication at a later date. All submissions will be acknowledged, and authors will receive notification of acceptance or rejection.