

Seniors as Law Enforcement Volunteers

Senior citizens can play an important role in their communities. Historically, seniors have given back to their communities by applying a lifetime of skills to volunteerism in schools, libraries, hospitals, and social service agencies. Through these activities, seniors not only help others but also themselves as they meet new people and feel valued and respected in their communities. Such involvement breaks the cycle of isolation and fear that sometimes affects seniors.

Law enforcement officers are discovering that seniors can play an important role in crime prevention as well. By engaging seniors who have an interest in the safety and security of their neighborhoods, law enforcement officers can gain valuable support in many important areas. An excellent way to involve seniors is through the Citizen's Observer Patrol (C.O.P.) Program. C.O.P.S is a nonprofit program that uses ordinary citizens with no law enforcement power or authority to carry out many routine law enforcement tasks.

If you are interested in starting a C.O.P.s program in your area, set up a small office for C.O.P. volunteers and let them file non-confidential papers, help victims of burglary replace stolen items (e.g., driver's licenses, social security cards), raise money, pass out crime prevention materials, organize Neighborhood Watch programs, and perform other administrative tasks.

They don't need uniforms, but they might all wear the same hats or jackets to distinguish themselves. Even if you decide not to start a C.O.P.s program, you can still encourage seniors to be the "eyes and ears" of their communities, reporting any suspicious activity they observe.

The C.O.P.s program is going strong in the Flagler County Sheriff's Office in Florida. Although the program, is open to anyone over 18 years of age, most of the volunteers are senior citizens. New members participate in a 40-hour training program where they are taught how to aid law enforcement officers in a variety of ways. At the Palm Coast Precinct, for example, many seniors are involved in fingerprinting, passing out informational packages like fire Arm Licensing, filling requests for vacation house checks, dispatching C.O.P. vehicles, and handling all related phone calls. In most cases, citizens coming into the Palm Coast precinct will initially be greeted by a C.O.P. member whose role will be to see that their concerns are properly channeled. C.O.P. members also patrol areas outside of schools and work as crossing guards and school bus patrols.