

# Older Volunteers:

## New Human Resources For Law Enforcement

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The words, "cutback management" no longer sound strange to law enforcement agencies, as they may have only a few short years ago. Departments, large and small, have had to come to grips with the realities of these words. For example, officials of the Los Angeles Police Department recently had to reduce the LAPD's manpower by 1,000 sworn and civilian personnel (a 10% reduction) owing to the decrease in revenues brought about by the adoption by California voters of "Proposition 13." However, Los Angeles is not unique in this respect. Departments with far lower manning levels, feeling the inflationary pinch to even more drastic degrees, are also reducing services and spreading their dwindling resources more sparingly as cuts are ordered.

In 1983 in Jersey City, New Jersey, there were 292 persons for every police officer. That's 34.2 officers for every 10,000 citizens of that community. In north-eastern Pennsylvania, the ratio is one officer for every 1,086 residents, or 9.2 officers per 10,000 persons. The average number of police employees in large metropolitan areas is 27.1 per 10,000 citizens. These data, taken from a U.S. Census Bureau Report, are highlighting a key question, and municipal budget deficits are leading law enforcement decision-makers to cut back.<sup>2</sup>

We look for long-term solutions, and some short-term expedients to resolve some of these vexing problems. Solutions are not easily achieved. But some agencies have begun to turn to a different concept — older or retired volunteers — new human resources that are being sought and augmented in support of police services.

Now, we all know that since the earliest days of organized law enforcement in this country, there have been reserves (some even uniformed and organized) and police auxiliary personnel, standing ready to assist regular personnel. By the 19th Century it was commonplace for a Sheriff to deputize a group of civilians in the community for specific short-term assistance. The concept we are advancing here, however, is augmenting the agency's functions with older or retired civilians from the community, brought on board to perform certain tasks heretofore executed only by professional police personnel. Today's cutback management is forcing departments to direct the efforts of their sworn personnel toward the most serious and urgent crime-related matters, and the solution for some is to rely upon volunteers to assist with the lesser functions that have come to occupy so much personnel time.

Over and beyond community crime prevention activities and active neighborhood watch or "crime-stopper" efforts, there are volunteers working in law enforcement agencies under the supervision of professional staff members. Older volunteers are coding and collating data for use by crime analysts to determine patterns and trends for forecasting. Older persons are performing crowd and traffic control functions at public events. Some retirees are installing security locks and alarms following the department's residential security survey recommendations. For some time in one Sheriff's office, a retired police officer has been coordinating the schedule of court appearances of prisoners in the county jail. Another older volunteer did such a good job in vehicle maintenance for his agency that he was authorized to fix one up and trained to use it himself in neighborhood patrol activities.

Has your law enforcement agency thought about older or retired persons? This concept is not a quick-fix, nor will it be the answer to all of the department's needs. But many agencies are finding the concept important as an augmentation of departmental operations.

As late as the 1970's, if one were to suggest older or retired persons serving in anything other than crime prevention programs at the periphery of the law enforcement function, it would have produced vocal and highly negative responses. In some communities, it still does. But more and more executives are looking toward the assistance that older volunteers can give to agency effectiveness as budgets are reduced, manpower ceilings are lowered, and there are greater demands than ever for service. Law enforcement policy-makers know that from 80% to 85% of their total budgets are consumed by personnel costs. At the same time there are growing difficulties in making criminal apprehensions. Officials are frustrated at procedural obstacles in the courts. There are demands for higher wages and increased benefits as law enforcement agencies impose higher educational or technological attainments upon some of their personnel. And while the public is outraged at the levels of crime everywhere they turn, many people today are of the opinion that crime reduction or crime prevention efforts are the responsibility of law enforcement alone. If we consider all of these factors, it is clear that even with the most generous budgets and unlimited personnel levels, it

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would be poor management practice to create professional positions for accomplishing all we can see that needs to be done. We must look to alternatives.

### Citizens & Law Enforcement . . . History

Police histories disclose that as early as 1252 in England, citizens were patrolling the streets as a part of a watch system inaugurated by Henry III, who appointed a Head Constable to manage these activities, with householders serving in rotation by selection from rosters. Before urban development, county sheriffs called out citizen volunteers to help preserve the peace or to deal with community emergencies. As English colonists settled in America, many of them were familiar with the watch system. In the industrial centers of the North, the Constable of the Watch was common, and in the agricultural South, counties formed with a Sheriff responsible for peace-keeping.

Our own young nation could not have survived had there not been helping hands to and from neighbors. Voluntarism was a way of life. Religious institutions had important responsibilities, as they do today, for works of mercy or civic improvements. Following the Revolutionary War, settlers in the New World formed volunteer societies to aid newcomers of like heritage or religion. These efforts were later expanded to help all who were needy, to build schools and homes, to raise barns and houses of worship, and to protect property and residents of the community from thieves and marauders. Early settlements could not have progressed otherwise. There were no paid service providers then.

As settlements developed into established communities, it became necessary to select (or elect) responsible officials to keep the peace. Growing communities in the Colonies began to pattern their law enforcement operations upon those of England, and in the City of New York there was established in 1844 a "day" and "night" police force modeled after the one in London.

Voluntarism is not new to the criminal justice system. According to the National Association of Volunteers in Criminal Justice (a non-profit membership organization dealing principally with offenders and correctional programs) in the United States volunteers founded the system, with the first penitentiaries established by the Quakers. In the 1600's and 1700's there was little or no government structure, and volunteers had to meet the social needs of the community, including acts of charity, building schools, maintaining roads and other community works, distributing news and providing protection. Social caseworkers and volunteer activities were outgrowths of society's efforts to deal with the consequences of the poor laws patterned after those of England. Unfortunately, there was some tendency to house in the same facility the poor, the vagrant, and those who would not work, with criminal offenders, causing untold difficulties. Citizen patrols grew and vigilante groups became common in rural areas. During and after the Revolutionary War, justice was a community

activity. With the advent of trade unions there also emerged benevolent groups to provide assistance to widows and orphans. Committees formed to deal with society's health problems; Hard times required that people devote more and more of their time to causes such as famine, temperance, and the abolition of slavery. Religious volunteers worked in slum areas and these efforts led to the development of settlement houses, charitable agencies and other programs for the public good. Today we have a wide range of voluntary organizations: the Salvation Army, The Boy/Girl Scouts of America, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the American Red Cross, and scores of others addressing specific causes.

But with law enforcement, it was almost the opposite. As towns and cities grew, police officials called upon citizens less and less until during the mid-1900's it was rare to use the skills and experience of citizens in performance of the law enforcement function. In many localities, this is the situation today.

### Volunteers In The 1980's

In 1981, the President focussed public attention on the role that the private sector can play in problem-solving. In an effort to re-direct some of the country's energies from heavy reliance upon government to more reliance upon the abilities of citizens, the President formed a Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, pointing out that more than 425,000 private organizations were donating voluntary public services in such areas as job training and placement, health care and maintenance, transportation, education, housing, nutrition, senior and youth activities, legal and consumer advice and countless other categories.

In announcing the Task Force, the President stated that altogether these private sector initiatives in public service comprised a \$150 billion annual undertaking, exceeding the combined FY 1982 budgets of eight cabinet departments of the Government.

After a year-long study, the Task Force reported that 93 million Americans were participating in some form of volunteer effort and that in 1981, citizens had donated over 8 billion hours of their time, valued at \$65 billion. The Task Force documented more than 2,500 different success stories of volunteer activities throughout America. Through a national poll, the Task Force has found high percentages of volunteers performing in religion, health services, and educational activities. *At the bottom of a diminishing list was "Justice", with a participation by volunteers of only 1%!* And most of this was volunteer work with offenders. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this small percentage, but I venture to suggest that many modern-day law enforcement planners have not been fully apprised of valuable and available human resources that older persons represent.

## New Trends

The President's Task Force noted that:

Volunteering is increasingly an activity involving those at either end of the age spectrum.

Volunteering is becoming an integral part of a person's life-long work experience, integrating unpaid work with paid work. It is being used increasingly as a vehicle for mainstreaming into society those individuals who had formerly been perceived as only recipients of services.

Volunteer service administration is now recognized as a true profession, with ethics and standards.

Volunteer experiences are increasingly being recognized as a consideration of cases for job applications.

Some colleges are giving academic credits for documented learning from volunteer experiences.

Some industries are granting released time to employees to perform specific volunteer services during regular working hours. Also, some are giving official company recognition to employees who are performing voluntary services in the public interest.

There is awareness that the country cannot create enough wealth to pay for all the services needed.

Some police professionals may have difficulty in becoming accustomed to the idea. On the other hand, some civilians tend to be mystified by, or in awe of police work, and might hesitate to offer their services, feeling their lack of "professionalism." The reluctance on both parts must be overcome.

Perhaps a way to begin to do this is to look at the changing nature of voluntarism and some of the misconception about today's volunteers in general.

**Myth:** Most volunteers are housewives in church programs.

**Fact:** Largest proportion of volunteers hold down full-time paid jobs outside the home.

**Myth:** Most volunteers work in hospitals, mainly holding patients' hands.

**Fact:** Now into almost every activity from Adopt a Tree to Zapping the Oil Refinery.

**Myth:** Volunteers are from the upper class — a case of "noblesse oblige."

**Fact:** Today it is students, minorities, teenagers, grandparents, ex-offenders, executives, and poor-people, among others.

**Myth:** Volunteers must be self-sacrificing.

**Fact:** Untrue. "What's in it for me?" is acceptable. Volunteers look for course credits, socialization, personal enrichment, new horizons.

**Myth:** Volunteerism doesn't lead anywhere.

**Fact:** Can lead to political office, salaried jobs, degrees, natural leadership roles.

**Myth:** Volunteers can take away paid jobs.

**Fact:** Few want full-time, long-term employment. (Only 2%).

**Myth:** Volunteers are not reliable. They don't carry through.

**Fact:** Not true, especially if properly motivated. Older volunteers are especially conscientious.

**Myth:** The professional can obviously do a better job than the volunteer.

**Fact:** Not if the volunteer has a lifetime of experience in the particular specialty.

**Myth:** Volunteers should not be given jobs of professionals.

**Fact:** Volunteers can complement the professional's performance.

**Myth:** Volunteers don't want to work with difficult problems.

**Fact:** Many are challenged by difficulty and perform well if properly informed and trained.

**Myth:** Volunteers are different from other people.

**Fact:** ? ? ?

## What Motivates A Volunteer?

No longer dominated by women, but enriched by growing numbers of men, volunteers come from all walks of life. They are employed persons, professionals, consumers of human services, the poor, minority groups, older persons, and some of the disadvantaged.

Program administrators find that volunteers are motivated:

- to change the organization or society
- to help with specific causes or people
- to learn more about a specific subject
- to become a part of decision-making process
- to find new roles in their lives
- to find new sources of funding for special interests
- to research new or changing values
- to remain in the mainstream of society
- to find better applications of human services

Most of all, the learner for volunteerism is doubly a volunteer — once for the education or training necessary, and secondly, to perform the service involved. Volunteering first to learn, and then to do!<sup>6</sup>

Harriet Naylor, widely recognized author and adult education administrator, states: "The services of highly trained and able professional staff can be extended in geometric proportion if able volunteers can share in supplementary responsibilities which are appropriate to their talents, skills and interests."

Police agencies can apply this geometry to many needs requiring supplemental performance of service by seeking the assistance of older persons to draw upon their experiences and personal skills.

## New Looks At Aging

A 1982 *Newsweek* report states: "By now the sight of vigorous people in their 8th or 9th decade is no longer unusual. But the phenomenon is still too novel to have sunk into the general consciousness." The article adds: "Too many people past 65 succumb to programming; they become 'old' because the world tells them they are old." In 1983 there were 80,000 persons over 90 and more than 8,000 over 100 years of age.

Gerontology professionals know that in the early 1900's women reared their children and then soon after they died. The average life expectancy was 49 years of age. In those days, older persons were viewed as survivors, having passed the perils of infancy, the uncertainties of childhood, and the ills that plagued younger adults.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, according to Dr. Robert Butler, former Director of the National Institute on Aging, two-thirds of the nation's social security retirements occur before annuitants reach 65 years of age and most of these face two stark alternatives: either full-time work or full-time retirement, with few options in between. In 1982, the average remaining lifetime at age 65 among males was 14.5 years and was 18.8 years for females.

Americans are living longer, healthier lives. Only recently has recognition of the value of this human resources begun to present other options to law enforcement administrators.

### Why Older Persons?

Older volunteers are law-abiding, and stable. They display good retention rates and good attendance records. They are especially committed once they understand how their contributions can fit into the agency's mission. They have large amounts of practical knowledge and experience. They are flexible and available. They rarely become officious. They provide a means of increasing the agency's cost-effectiveness and efficiency. They can help bring about a better understanding of the problems of, and the constraints upon, the law enforcement agency. Older persons quickly grasp the need for confidentiality and become excellent team players. Most who are not suitable for the work screen themselves naturally from further commitment to the program.

Recent studies show that many law enforcement agencies devote as much as 80% or more of their time to delivering services that are unrelated to enforcing the law or the pursuit or apprehension of criminal offenders. Some of the services that take much of an officer's time are: looking for lost or runaway children, assisting disabled or disoriented persons, even delivering babies! Traffic problems take an enormous amount of a police agency's time. Officers spend hours writing reports, keeping records, disseminating information, and responding to non-crime calls for service.

When we speak of volunteers, we are not talking about supplanting highly skilled professionals. We are talking about mature persons willing to perform tasks in support of the functions of the professional staff. Essential to the concept's success are well-defined roles and training as well as self-development opportunities for the volunteers, and a perception by the community that the services provided are of value to the police agency's operations.

### What Can Older Volunteers Do?

Obviously there are many elderly persons not suited to such work, or who neither need nor desire to participate in public programs. But for many, there is an urgent need to give service.

Older persons, once they are trained and oriented to the agency's procedures and policies, can do telephone follow-up interviews to help expand investigative information. They can perform selected on-site visits to collect information from witnesses, victims, neighbors and others. They can assist with evidence-handling, work in crime or photolabs, assist with the administration of civil processes. There are volunteers performing valuable search-and-rescue missions, or serving as beat representatives in community crime prevention efforts. Older volunteers can assist with residential or commercial security surveys, mark property, or perform vacation checks of premises. Some are skilled at management and budget formulation. Some can write or develop other creative materials. Volunteers can serve as ambassadors of the department, mobilizing community support. They can open important community doors, recruit other volunteers, and build networks for information-sharing.

Older or retired volunteers have fewer accidents than some others. They are more deliberate and more careful with equipment. They perform as directed, and they prefer to avoid trouble. They accept their assignments with good nature, anxious to give quality performances. There follows a list of the support roles that have been identified:

Arson prevention	Hunter safety instructors
Anonymous reporting	Inventory maintenance
Administrative/clerical tasks	Investigative follow-up
Bad check alerts	Lab report proofing
Civil process administration	Missing persons
Communications	Neighborhood patrol
Crime analysis	Parking violations
Crime prevention	Photography lab
Crime reporting	Pleasure/regatta boat patrols
Crowd and traffic control	Property records maintenance
Computer data entry	Property recovery lists
DUI data processing	Public relations/media
Emergency first aid	Records processing
Equipment control	Scientific consulting
Equipment maintenance	Search and rescue
Evidence packaging	Translators
Fraud alerts	Water patrols
Fingerprinting suspects	Writing: reports, bulletins
	Youth programs

### Assistance provided by the volunteers:

- Increases police responsiveness
- Increases service delivery
- Increases cost-effectiveness
- Enhances operations
- Enhances staff professionalism
- Improves system efficiency
- Improves image to public
- Increases public confidence
- Relieves sworn personnel for other duties
- Extends life of programs
- Increases political support
- Enhances patrol/community partnerships
- Improves information input
- Increases flexibility
- Brings new skills and expertise
- Prompts new enthusiasm
- Provides new program opportunities
- Allows fund reallocations to other tasks
- Increases linkage with the law abiding

### Problems or Concerns

Other publications and major studies deal in some detail with the major concerns of an agency; i.e., acceptance of volunteers by paid staff and unions, and safeguards against liability. With careful planning these problems can be, and are being, managed. Only in communities with extraordinarily strong police unions has there been nearly insurmountable resistance. In most cases, with firm executive commitment from the outset and equally firm assurances to paid staff about the nature and extent of volunteer participation, programs are successful. Advance planning with agency or other authorized legal counsel can provide protections from liability.

A director of a state volunteer program has said with respect to legal liability:<sup>1</sup>

"A program run by paid staff, which was not accountable to local officials, which was not well planned and well managed, would be every bit as much at risk as any volunteer program. There are no special liabilities for volunteer programs. The volunteers should be considered as authorized, albeit unpaid, agents of the locality and protected accordingly." He suggests that administrators view the risks volunteers might bring to the department just as they would anticipate potential liabilities with paid staff.

### Try Creative New Uses of Older Resources

We are undergoing great social changes in our country. New technological advances are forcing us to examine the old familiar ways, customs and institutions. Among other things, new looks are being given to public service opportunities by organizations in the private sector. Citizens everywhere, concerned about crime rates, are beginning to resume personal responsibility for helping to resolve these problems. One new approach — the acquisition of the services of older or retired volunteers to assist or support police functions — is demonstrating success. For example: in the Jacksonville, Florida, Police Department, a 75-year-old volunteer has donated more than 1,000 recorded man-hours of service in the past three years. This is the

equivalent of the time of two full-time officers but it does not require the pay and allowances or the benefits programs of paid employees. This volunteer's work has directly contributed to a 27% increase in the department's in-progress arrests. If even one-half of the approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies in this country were to acquire the services of such a volunteer, it could not fail to have positive effects. More and more agencies are thinking anew. Have you thought about older or retired persons to assist your law enforcement agency?

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Lee Pearson retired after 31 years of Federal Service in 1973. She spent more than 20 years in the Office of the Secretary of Defense where her work involved activities dealing with the reserve and national guard of the respective military departments. Since 1973 she has been principal assistant to George Sunderland, the developer and national coordinator of AARP's Criminal Justice Services. CJS develops and implements programs to reduce the criminal victimization of older persons, provides training to help law enforcement officers understand and deal more effectively with the aging as well as how to place older or retired persons in effective support roles with law enforcement.



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