

Summary of the Senior Citizens Awareness Network (SCAN) Protect

The elderly population in rural and urban Tennessee is no different than anywhere else in America. The number of elderly is rapidly growing in population. Longer life does not always mean better health. As the population of elderly grows, they have also become victims of more crisis situations, i.e., scams, theft, rape and homicide. In some instances this means they must be watched over. Many times through the years, when law enforcement personnel would make checks on these elderly, they have found seriously ill, or even deceased, elderly people. A more pro-active approach was needed to identify the at-risk elderly who live at home in order to give us a better idea of who they were. And a plan needed to be implemented for a way to check on these elderly on a regular basis. Sheriff Ashe went to the local health care facility, UMC TENET hospital and asked them to enter into a joint venture between the Sheriff's Department and the private sector. This venture would form a group of senior citizens who would work as volunteers to help check on other senior citizens who were homebound. The hospital agreed to help fund such a program if the Sheriff could put it together. The Sheriff created a program called SCAN (Senior Citizens Awareness Network). This program would be made up of trained Senior Citizens who would go out every day in a marked county patrol car and make routine visits to the elderly. The names of these citizens to be checked on had to be submitted to the department by family or church members, or friends. The volunteers took training in the areas of home security, basic first aid, radio and police procedures, Department Policy and Procedure and victim out-reach instruction. The program became a public/private financial venture with the local hospital.

The results have been excellent. We know that the goal of better serving the elderly through law enforcement is being achieved. These volunteers have made hundreds of visits to the elderly on a regular basis, making them feel safer and more comfortable in their homes knowing that law enforcement, through the volunteers, are checking on them. Also, our calls for welfare checks have been drastically lowered because of our proactive approach to checking on these citizens on a regular basis.

Description of Senior Citizens Awareness Network (SCAN) Project

The Wilson County Sheriff's Department has for years answered the request of the public to check on elderly people who have not been seen or heard from in a few days. These requests came from family or friends who were out of state or far away enough that they could not check on them in person. There are many elderly persons who live alone in all parts of the county. Many live in very rural areas where they do not have close neighbors. Often times, the checks had to be placed on hold while more pressing calls for assistance were answered. We answered on a priority basis. Many times through the years, when law enforcement personnel would make their checks, they have found seriously ill, or even deceased, elderly people.

This problem was identified by patrol officers, County Commissioners, political figures, Directors of Senior Citizens Centers, AARP, the media, Wilson County Emergency Management Agency, medical personnel, the Sheriff and University Medical Center hospital. Sheriff Deputies and sometimes Emergency Medical Personnel for the county were the ones who responded to these requests. This tied up valuable resources in a county which spans five hundred sixty-seven (567) square miles with approximately ninety five thousand (95,000) residents. Wilson County Sheriff Terry Ashe began to look at other states and law enforcement agencies to develop a plan to routinely check on the elderly in a cost effective manner with a proactive approach.

Of all the problems that we deal with, this was a priority. The elderly population in rural and urban Tennessee is no different than anywhere else in America. The number of elderly is rapidly growing in population. Longer life does not always mean better health. As the population of elderly grows, they have also become victims of more crisis situations, i.e., scams, theft, rape and homicide. In some instances this means they must be watched over.

A more pro-active approach was needed to identify the at-risk elderly who live at home in order to give us a better idea of who they were. We had been to some of their homes on several occasions at the request of family or friends. Our department answered calls every week for welfare checks and elderly assistance because Law Enforcement personnel have always been the first line of response to the calls for assistance. Our county population has grown to the point that we are one of the fastest growing counties in the state and, as a result, we have seen the number of requests for assistance also rise. The time spent on these types of calls range from the distance a deputy would have to travel to do the welfare check to the time spent at the residence, sometimes fifteen to twenty minutes. Others could take an hour, depending on what was found once they arrived.

The welfare of the resident is always the most important concern. Some of the elderly people had not been heard from in days or weeks. The time spent by officers responding to the call took up a great deal of time. If crime scenes were present after the officer arrived, the highly trained personnel who are called in for crimes were then in a

cold crime scene. Often, it would be hard to even locate the next-of-kin with a natural cause of death. Very little personal history could be found on some of the elderly.

Sheriff Terry Ashe went to health care agencies and social programs that were run by the state to see if any programs were being conducted in his county using a proactive check on the elderly. No one had any active program to identify these people and check on them before a serious problem arose. Small attempts were made to have telephone banks run by Senior Citizens Centers but the end result was that law enforcement personnel had to be sent to a home when there was no answer. Law enforcement funds were mainly restricted to solve problems, targeting the basic needs of a large agency.

The Sheriff checked with other states and state agencies in an attempt to find funding and to review other programs which had been started. There was no legislation that existed in the State of Tennessee to help with this problem and there was no funding that could be found to start a proactive check on senior citizens before the call for help was needed.

Sheriff Ashe went to the local health care facility, University Medical Center TENET hospital and asked them to enter into a joint venture between the Sheriff's Department and the private sector. This venture would form a group of senior citizens who would work as volunteers to help check on other senior citizens who were homebound. The hospital agreed to help fund such a program if the Sheriff could put it together. The Sheriff explained that it would be modeled after what other agencies had

done across the country since this would be the first Public/Private financial venture of its kind. Relying on information from AARP, Civic Clubs, and Senior Citizen organizations, the Sheriff then went to work on this project.

The Sheriff created a program called SCAN (Senior Citizens Awareness Network), a modified program from other agencies. The difference is that this program would be made up of trained Senior Citizens who would go out every day in a marked county patrol car and make routine visits to the elderly. The names of these citizens to be checked on had to be submitted to the department by family members, friends or Church. The volunteers would take training in the areas of home security, basic first aid, radio and police procedures, Department Policy and Procedure and victim out-reach instruction. The difference is that it became a public/private financial venture with the local hospital.

The goal was to identify those elderly people in the county who were at-risk elderly living alone who had little or no family that checked on them on a regular basis; to build a relationship of trust between our SCAN volunteers, the Sheriff's Department and other agencies that could be called upon for help. The SCAN program would offer us in the Department a valuable link between the Sheriff's Department, the elderly and the medical community and social services.

The other goals that would be accomplished is that these regular visits would help stop some of the routine calls for assistance that the law enforcement agencies of this area were having to answer on welfare checks. Always remember that a third party has

requested the welfare check and not the person at the residence where the officer is going. After arriving at the scene and finding locked doors and/or windows, a decision has to be made for entry. Failure to act could cost the life of a seriously ill person and a forced entry could cause damage to an occupied home. The volunteers would need to be well trained to determine the best course.

Visits to other departments that had similar programs were conducted. In order to implement this project it was decided to first educate the community, civic clubs and the media and also to use the Senior Citizens organizations and the AARP to identify those elderly living alone. A volunteer senior citizen was selected to oversee the program. Brochures were developed to hand out to civic organizations and senior citizen organizations stating that welfare checks would be provided free of charge to shut-in elderly citizens. A response form was placed in the pamphlet to provide referrals to the SCAN organization at the Sheriffs Department address.

A local program called Leadership Wilson took on the task of designing and developing a booklet to be used as a directory for assistance that could be handed out to every person visited by SCAN volunteers. These directories directed the citizens to where they could get certain governmental assistance as well as private assistance. The booklets were printed and paid for by the University Medical Center.

There has been very little difficulty in the implementation of the program. It has gone very well with much public and private support. The biggest difficulty being

Sheriff Ashe taking the new program to Wilson County Commissioners for approval of this low cost volunteer effort with private support. After the initial understanding of a minimal capital expense, the Commissioners approved the program by voice vote.

Older patrol cars were re-marked and used as vehicles to transport the volunteer SCAN officers to the location of elderly residents. A full-time patrol Captain took this program under his wing to help liaison this department with the volunteers. A small office space was provided at the Sheriff's Department to give the volunteers a place to work. Communication was established between the dispatchers and the volunteers. Private sectors helped to raise funds for printing and other miscellaneous needs and were set up in bank accounts to help the elderly who might need financial assistance. Fund-raising activities are scheduled by civic groups to help provide funds for unforeseen expenses.

Sheriff Ashe attended nearly every civic organization within his county to ask for support of the volunteers who would be working in the program through his office to help meet the needs of the elderly who were shut-ins. He used the local media, both print and radio, to get out his message. The public response has been great. There are now twenty (20) SCAN volunteers, mostly all senior citizens, who are uniformed and trained. These volunteers go out on a daily basis to check on the elderly. Since May of 2000, the volunteers have logged more than 3,000 hours of service and have driven nearly 7,000 miles checking on seniors who live alone. Without the volunteers' help, this program would not have been successful. More seniors want to volunteer to work as space and

equipment may become available. The program recently won an Award of Excellence from the Greater Nashville Regional Council on Aging. This Council is comprised of fifty-two (52) cities and thirteen (13) counties in Middle Tennessee. There were relatively no problems implementing the response plan as intended. The plan was received with great results from the public and with much public support.

Although we are still studying the over-all impact of the program, we know that the goal of better serving the elderly through law enforcement is being achieved. These volunteers have made hundreds of visits to the elderly on a regular basis, making them feel safer and more comfortable in their homes knowing that law enforcement through the volunteers are checking on them. Our calls for welfare checks have been drastically lowered because of our pro-active approach to checking on these citizens on a regular basis. We also notify their families to let them know we have checked on their family member. This gives the family peace of mind.

Our results are measured in the amount of new referrals we receive from the public each week. The trust level that has been shown by the volunteers and the concern for the people they visit has driven up the number of people in the program to the point that we are asking for new volunteers in order to start another class. Sheriff Ashe has taken advantage of every opportunity to get the message out regarding the program. The media has printed pictures and stories numerous times about SCAN activities. This has helped in the program being publicized as well as getting new volunteers.

Everything is looking great. I-However, we are still evaluating the program daily. The bringing in of additional volunteers and the maintenance of surplus equipment along with the number of requests for visits will take a concerted effort to keep the program going. We are keeping our data bank updated weekly of current recipients. We have had a study of the program with good record keeping that reflects great results in the last nine (9) months. Sheriff Ashe will continue to accept responses from the public on the status of the volunteer program. Local records will show how welfare checks by on-duty *officers* have been reduced by the volunteer's efforts in this pro-active program.

Sheriff Ashe has received many letters to the editor and feed-back from civic clubs on the progress of this new program. Public response has been great, the elderly are happier and healthier as a result, and the Sheriff's officers are free to take care of other pressing matters.

Agency and Officer Information

1. At what level of the police organization was this problem-solving initiative adopted (e.g., the entire department, a few select officers, etc.)?

Lieutenants and above in the Wilson County Sheriffs office were the levels where input into the problem-solving initiatives were adopted. Later, the implementation was passed down through all levels to patrol and dispatch.

2. Did officers or management receive any training in problem-oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution?

Not a great deal. Community policing techniques have been in place for a number of years and this program helped in taking better control of those senior citizens in the target group.

3. Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving?

Yes. Helping support this volunteer group gives every officer a closer insight into the safety of the elderly in the community. As they began to see how useful the program was and how effective it had been, they realized it was freeing up more time for them to do other law enforcement functions.

4. What resources and guidelines (manuals, past problem-solving examples, etc.) were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem-solving initiative?

The Standard Offense Reporting System was all that was used. The guidelines about all reports being filed were and kept for additional information.

5. What issues/problems were identified with the problem-oriented policing model or the problem-solving model?

The one issue that came to focus more than any other was how many elderly people were living alone and were requesting that we have someone who could check on their safety and well-being.

6. What general resources (financial and/or personnel) were committed to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget?

A partnership with University Medical Center and their desire to be involved with giving something back to the community led them to become one of our greatest financial backers. Since then, funds have been raised from community fund-raisers and private donations to help with the cost of the program. The local chapter of AARP has been very helpful in this area.

7. Include the following project contact person information:

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