

Raising Awareness of the Needs of Older Adults as Drivers and Riders: A 4-Part Workshop

Older drivers are a major source of volunteer ride assistance. AARP reports that older drivers as a class are safer than their younger counterparts. Yet, in a collision, older drivers are at greater risk of fatality. What can we do to ensure that older drivers remain safely mobile as long as possible?

ALOFT has received funding from the Federal Transportation Administration and the Westchester Department of Senior Programs and Services to conduct 4 1-hour awareness-building workshops with local public safety personnel, taxi drivers, and older drivers themselves.

An Occupational Therapist, experienced in working with cross-generational groups, will lead the 4 workshops.

Purpose: The purpose of the workshop is to sensitize public safety, taxi drivers, older volunteers and others who come in frequent contact with older adults to their unique needs. Improved sensitivity will result in improved social interactions, understanding, and cooperation for those whose businesses involve serving older adults. We hope and expect that increased sensitivity will gain repeat customers for their services and more respectful interactions.

Some topics to be covered:

1. The Aging of America: brief look at the demographics of our nation and local community; Baby boomers are joining the Older Adult age category. Population is shifting.
2. Out-of-home activities are critical for a sense of well-being and quality of life: Older adults continue to participate in activities to maintain their health and enjoy leisure activities to keep fit, mentally active and connected.
3. Supporting a diversified community enriches all generations: Our responsibility to older adults is to support their active participation in community activities in ways that encourage intergenerational interaction and benefit the entire community.
4. Understanding the changing physiological needs of older adults: Reviewing the effects of aging on each of our senses is a simple way to raise our awareness of the multiple needs and limitations older adults may be dealing with in their daily lives. The audience will be given an opportunity to experience sensory difficulties in the areas of vision, hearing and movement after each area is presented.

Vision Issues: Discuss the impact of macular degeneration, glaucoma, loss of depth perception, the effects of bright lights, strobe lights, night time vision, etc. on a person's ability to move, engage and respond to oncoming stimuli in their environment

Auditory Issues: Hearing loss and its effect on personal safety and movement, the problems of combined hearing and visual impairments

Touch Issues/fine motor coordination: Older Adults often experience changes in their ability to feel and discriminate objects with their fingers. Decreased tactile perception leads older adults to use their vision more to help them complete fine motor tasks successfully. Dexterity and speed are reduced for all hand activities. This includes managing seatbelts, opening car doors and managing their wallet.

Cognitive Functions: level of concentration, long term and short term memory
Impairments in hearing increases the difficulty of retaining information as it was not heard correctly and may lead to further confusion.

Gross Motor Movement: 20% of active older adults use ambulatory devices such as canes and walkers to move about. Movement is slower, more deliberate and requires planning for getting in and out of vehicles and managing uneven surfaces, stairs, curbs, managing doorways, etc. Adults may have reduced strength, flexibility and endurance

5. Compensation Techniques: Helping our older adults be successful: Once participants become more aware of some the major issues affecting older adults, we can discuss simple compensation strategies to help make interactions more successful and rewarding.
- Make eye contact. Look the person in the eye when you are talking to them.
 - Be mindful that they may be reading your lips because they have a hearing loss.
 - Talk slowly enough and enunciate your words to be sure you are understood and the older adult is able to retain your message. Ask to make sure. Ask if they have any questions. If the situation warrants it, write down the information clearly in large handwriting for them. It will save time later and avoid confusion.
 - Allow for extra time getting in and out of a vehicle. Allow extra time for motor planning and reduced endurance; select a clear path free of obstacles when exiting a vehicle.
 - Be aware of where your car is parked in relation to a curb, proximity to the building entrance. Is there a ramp or handicapped entrance available?
 - Be on the lookout for momentary imbalance as older adults exit a vehicle and come to standing. Give them a few moments to get their bearing, adjust to the lighting outside the vehicle before moving forward. Taking the time to assist an older adult, especially if they have an ambulatory device will win future business and respect. Older adults have an active network and share information about what community members and organizations have been helpful to them or not!
 - Ensure the safety of your passengers with seatbelts. Older adults may have difficulty putting on their seatbelt.

- Be aware of the lighting: Bright lights can be painful. Do not shine a flashlight in an older person's face. Visual acuity is reduced in dim or nighttime lighting. Allow for reduced peripheral vision by pointing out obstacles to older adult.
- Be sensitive to loud noises and their ability to fluster older adults and create increased anxiety and stress in an unfamiliar setting.

Additional suggestions will be given at the presentation. The above items are among the most important.

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Please see attached resume for presenter.