

## **Are Children Being Protected in Your Nonprofit Organization?**

When sexual predators prey on children, there are always at least two side effects – an enormous amount of pain and grief, and a period of finger-pointing when parents, lawmakers, and others work to determine who is at fault. Frequently, the blame doesn't just lie with the perpetrators themselves, but also third parties who didn't take the necessary precautions to protect the minors in their care.

This should be of particular concern to nonprofit organizations, most of which employ only very cursory background check processes (or none at all). Following high-profile lawsuits, many organizations compare volunteer names against sex offender registries and court records, but that isn't going nearly far enough – in either a court of law or the court of public opinion.

Many people will already be familiar with the legal troubles that the Boy Scouts of America faced when it was determined they were partially liable for allowing sexual molestation to occur while young people were under their supervision. What they may not realize, however, is that thousands of other organizations could be similarly liable. And even beyond the damage to an organization's finances and credibility, few things could be worse than being blamed for the worst of crimes.

### **Why Criminals Like to Target Nonprofits**

At first glance, a nonprofit or charitable group might seem like a poor choice for any kind of criminal. Look closer, though, and you'll see that most volunteer opportunities feature some combination of personal contact, access to sensitive records, and very few barriers to entry. In fact, the policy at a lot of nonprofits is to "just say yes" to new volunteers because the group is so short on staff members and donations. Working on the theory that any help is good help, they'll accept just about anyone who walks through the door.

But, consider what happens when the wrong person decides to join as a volunteer or staff member:

- ✓ It's unlikely that their identity or motives will be questioned by anyone at the nonprofit.
- ✓ Because they may work with other volunteers and staff members who are on a rotating schedule, there may be little in the way of ongoing oversight.
- ✓ At most, they'll likely be subjected to the kind of so-called "instant" background check that criminals know how to evade.
- ✓ In a matter of hours or days, they could have access to nonprofit facilities, people's homes, petty cash and valuable equipment, or even other volunteers.

The obvious answer to this problem, of course, is to use live, trained investigators to evaluate staff members and volunteers *before* they have a chance to do any wrong. For most nonprofits, this can seem like an impossibility, since they can't afford the small fees companies like ISC charge, or don't want to divert the funds from other projects.

### **The Answer to Nonprofit Background Screening Problems**

And so, how can nonprofits and charities get the background screening and identity verification they need, but without having to break their budgets to get it? The easy answer is to pass those costs along to volunteers themselves and let them pay for their self-screening.

That might sound like a big deterrent to recruiting new members to an organization, but the reality is that it's a very small obstacle for someone who is truly committed to assisting with your cause. And better yet, those with a criminal history aren't likely to pay money to raise red flags themselves, so it can be effective in deterring potential volunteers with the wrong motives.

It has been shown time and time again in several courts that nonprofits and other organizations have a duty to protect children and others from dangerous criminals when they should have known the risks. With adequate nonprofit background screening, you can do the right thing for your group, your volunteers, and everyone else who is associated with your organization.

**About The Author:** J. Denton (Denny) Dobbins is Nationally and Internationally recognized as the world's leader in Premises Liability Protection and has been featured across North America sharing the stage with Political Leaders, Police Celebrities, Administrators and Business Leaders. Since 1978, Denny has been involved with the detection and deterrence of Criminal Activity in properties and employment of all types.