

Background Checks and Barrier Crimes

Just how important is it to conduct criminal background checks on your staff and volunteers? One national youth organization recently conducted a study of 1650 volunteer/staff applicants from 24 states. The organization consulted with experts to establish what crimes made an applicant undesirable. Those crimes, referred to as barrier crimes, are animal cruelty, drug, assault, and sex misdemeanors, as well as felony convictions. The study found that over 12% of all applicants had some form of criminal history, and 5% had been convicted of a barrier crime. Of the 12% of applicants who had a criminal history, over half falsified their application response by indicating they had no criminal history.

Criminal background checks are an essential tool in hiring qualified staff and selecting volunteers. However, they are just one tool you can use to prevent child abuse in your program. Here are some other strategies:

- Interview all candidates: Because many child abusers have no criminal record, a face-to-face interview is critical. It's also imperative to check at least three references.
- Document your policies: Your camp or club's policies must be clearly described, in writing, and your staff trained to implement them.
- Provide adequate supervision: Prohibit or limit staff from being alone with children, or children being alone with other children.
- Design your facility: With proper facility design, you can improve observation and reduce opportunities for abuse to take place.

For more information, go to www.campinsurance.com and click Safety Resources to login with your camp's name. Click on Online Safety Guides in the left menu bar, and then click on "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design".

To get background checks at a deeply discounted rate, go to Markel's web site, www.campinsurance.com, click on Safety Resources to login and click on the Background Checks button.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.