

# Setting the Stage for an Abuse-Free Organization

## Screen Out Potential Abusers

Human service organizations are always on the lookout for the brightest, most talented and highly qualified people to add to their teams. Whether hiring for direct care, office support or top management positions, we strive to find the people with the most expertise and skill. A great deal of time is spent on reviewing a potential staff member's education, work and volunteer experience, as well as personal presentation, hoping to provide clients with the best people to meet their needs. In that search, it is most important to remember that our clients' biggest need is to be safe. Thus the top priority during any employee search must be to screen applicants for the potential of abuse and neglect.



There is no foolproof way of keeping abusers off your team. However, the following steps should help you minimize the risks.

## Screen Everyone

Whether the hiring agent knows the person personally, they come highly recommended by well respected employees, or even if they are related to the top management of the organization, anyone associated with a human service agency (no matter the client base) needs to be thoroughly screened.

These policies should include expectations for all interactions with clients whether they are during work hours or outside the employee's shift.

## An Abuse-Free Organization

Send the message early and often that the organization's top priority is to protect the clients and staff from abuse.

## Policies and Procedures

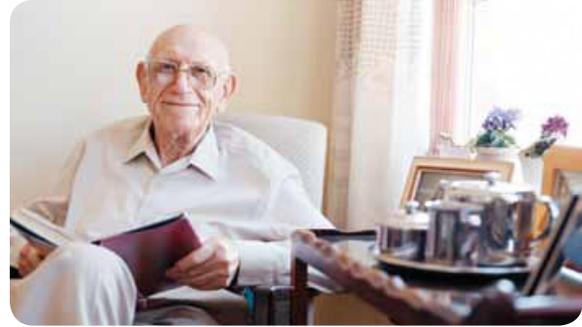
Make sure that you have clearly-defined policies and procedures that address the issues of abuse and employee conduct.

- a. Before a potential candidate even fills out an application they should be given and asked to read the agency policies on abuse and neglect and employee conduct.

- b. Have the potential candidate sign a statement that they fully understand those policies and that if hired they will adhere to the policies at all times.
- c. Have the potential candidate fill out a release for a criminal background check.
- d. Give them a written statement letting them know exactly what will immediately disqualify them from consideration.
- e. Give them a written policy on your stance of keeping all information confidential and secured.

## Background Checks\*

Once again let the candidate know you are serious about hiring only safe employees. Before they are given an application, ask them to sign a release to conduct a full criminal background check. It is important to have the candidate sign an authorization for the background check, before one is performed. Be aware that if the background check is conducted by a third-party vendor, your organization must comply with the Fair Credit Reporting Act's pre-adverse and adverse notification requirements. Also, be sure to comply with all Federal, State and local laws on background checks. The release should include an area for the potential candidate to document all of the addresses they have resided at, whether it is in the organization's state or not. However, checking only the state the organization is in, is just not enough. A national background check must be a part of your screening process to ensure that those convicted of abuse in a different state are identified before an offer of employment is made. National background checks can be costly, and non-profit budgets are always tight, but the short term costs will more



than benefit the organization if just one perpetrator is identified or discouraged from moving forward with the process. Hanover has developed a partnership with Intellicorp to assist our customers in keeping costs down.

## The Application

At this point, a candidate can be given a thorough written application form. Make sure that the application includes a statement that all former employers must be documented. If you find any gaps in employment, they should be addressed during the personal interview stage. In addition, ask the candidate to put their direct supervisors name and contact information. Assure the applicant that you will not contact past employers without discussing it with them first. Again, follow up during the interview to ensure this is the correct person and not a co-worker, friend etc.

## The Interview

If the determination is made to bring a candidate in for a personal interview, make sure that everyone involved in the interview process is formally trained on interview techniques for screening the potential for abuse, i.e., open ended questions, scenarios of potential incidents, etc.

\* Ensure that your organizations process for conducting criminal background checks is legally sound. Consult county, state, and national laws and regulations, as well as your organizations attorney and insurance company, as needed.

Whenever possible try and have all candidates interview with multiple people. When the process is complete those who participated in the interviews should meet and formally debrief. Any deviations or inconsistencies should be seen as a red flag that warrants follow-up.

## Reference Checks

The best predictor of the future is the past. Reference checks provide critical information about candidates. What past employers say about the candidate shouldn't be the ultimate decision maker, but they clearly know the person better than you. Always seek verbal references, as written references are difficult to verify. Conversations can elicit much more information than written responses but make

sure you are talking with the right person. One phone call to HR should clarify the role that the reference plays at the agency and whether they can officially give an employer reference. While some employers will only give you dates of employment, at a minimum try and get them to commit to the question of whether they would consider hiring the candidate back in the future.

Hiring an employee is a long process; and again while these steps will not guarantee that you will keep potential abusers from joining your team, if they screen out just one won't it be worth the time, cost and effort?

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