



CASE STUDY

Alliance of Therapy Dogs

Organization Background

Alliance of Therapy Dogs is one of the largest therapy dog organizations in the United States. Since 1990, the nonprofit has provided therapy dog testing, registration, support, and insurance for volunteers who participate in animal-assisted activities like visits to hospitals, special needs centers, mental health facilities, schools, nursing homes, and more. At ATD, they're dedicated to ensuring all dogs have the right temperament and wellbeing for therapy regardless of breed or age and have a strong relationship with their owners. With over 15,000 volunteers nationwide, ATD is dedicated to bringing support and joy to those who need it most through top-notch pet therapy.

Background

Alliance of Therapy Dogs discovered that prospective volunteers weren't always providing honest answers on their applications. They had a disclaimer asking volunteers if they had past felonies and if they answered "no," the volunteer would be passed through to the next step in the review process. "One day a new member called to let us know our system was flawed, as she answered "no" to having a past felony, even though she had one," said Smith. "She had already received her certificate for approval and that's when we realized we needed a more reliable solution for conducting our volunteer background checks," she said.

Solution

They began searching for a background screening solution and one of their members suggested Sterling Volunteers. Alliance of Therapy Dogs research and investigation committee sat down with Sterling Volunteers and set a date for implementation shortly after. "We knew we needed to go live January 1, 2018, to ensure the new background check process was clearly outlined in our new member handbooks," said Smith. "Sterling Volunteers worked with us to get ramped up in a short timeframe. It's given us a tool we didn't have before for seamless background checks and reporting. It's so nice to work with a company that understands who we are and what we do."

Sterling Volunteers has helped Alliance of Therapy Dogs transform their background screening process to easily identify red flags and ensure Alliance of Therapy Dogs gets the right volunteers working with their therapy dogs in the field. "We get around 3,000 applicants a year, and it's nice to have a reliable solution to eliminate the chance of misinformation provided by prospective volunteers," said Smith.

Results

The implementation process was painless for Alliance of Therapy Dogs, even with volunteers who aren't the most tech-savvy. "We have an older member base in their 60's and even some in their 80's, but overall, our online background check process has been running very smoothly," said Smith. "We don't have the hassle of shuffling paper-based forms around and the dashboards make it easy to flag criminal history and past felonies which helps us rest easier at night."

Sterling Volunteers' dashboard reports have helped Smith's team gain a holistic understanding of the growing number of interested volunteers and given them insight to share with their Board of Directors. "Our board loves the reports," said Smith. "It's nice to have statistics that show user interest to point to in our board meetings, and the reports also help our team plan for future growth."

Key Highlight

Alliance of Therapy Dogs was relying on public record data and self-reporting information during the volunteer review and approval process. This proved to be error prone, so they sought a more reliable background screening solution and selected Sterling Volunteers based on their ability to streamline their screening process and deep experience working with the nonprofit sector. "Sterling Volunteers had extensive knowledge and experience working with other therapy organizations and nonprofits and we were very comfortable with that," said Billie Smith, Executive Director of Alliance of Therapy Dogs.



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- Billie Smith, Executive Director, Volunteer Services, Alliance of Therapy Dogs