

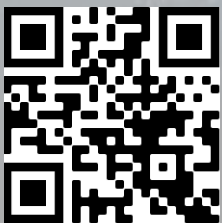
CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 21

IN THIS ISSUE:

- From The Director's Desk
- All Roads Go Back to Staff Wellness...
- How Many Apples Are In A Seed?
- What Can YOU Do To Make It Better?
- Self-Paced TCF Is Here!
- Bucket Of Rocks Or Toolbox?
- Quote Of The Month
- In Memoriam



DESERTWATERS.COM

SEPTEMBER 2024



A Desert Waters Publication

A NON-PROFIT FOR THE HEALTH OF CORRECTIONAL & OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES, STAFF AND FAMILIES

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As I was preparing this issue of the Correctional Oasis, my heart and mind kept going back to the topic of what EACH ONE OF US CAN DO to improve a situation to at least some degree, no matter who we are, where we operate, and what the challenge may be.

So, this issue is about empowerment to be agents of positive impact through making strategic choices based on the nature and extent of our sphere of influence. We all, from administrators to frontline staff, can do something at some level to improve a targeted area—be it our circumstances, our home lives, our workforce culture, even someone else's life. We achieve that by choosing to focus on controlling what we can control, and letting go of the rest, as the famous **Serenity Prayer** states.

A wide range of power is conferred to us by our abilities, our roles, and our circumstances. At one

end of the spectrum, we have the power wielded by legislators and administrators who can bring about change to entire systems with a stroke of a pen and a policy. At the other end of the spectrum, we have countless individuals who work in corrections and other public safety professions who have the power to make positive changes in their lives that benefit their health, their family, and by extension their workplace and their community.

We all have a sphere of influence, be it larger or smaller, at work and at home. That power carries with it a sacred sense of responsibility, because it makes us able to be **AGENTS FOR GOOD**. Let us not waste our abilities and opportunities to impact ourselves and our world positively.

Caterina Spinaris



ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS: RETHINKING PRIORITIES IN CORRECTIONAL SYSTEMS

BY STEPHANIE RAWLINGS, MSC

This article is an example of strategies that administrators and other decision-makers can implement to make lasting improvements on correctional and other public safety systems.

During a recent **webinar** where I was a guest panelist discussing the implementation of a comprehensive staff wellness program for a large state correctional system, a seemingly simple phrase emerged from my reflections: "All roads go back to staff wellness." At the time, I did not fully appreciate its depth, but feedback from colleagues highlighted its profound implications. This phrase, though unadorned and lacking immediate impact, encapsulates a crucial insight into the operational success of correctional systems. Understanding its significance requires an exploration of the context in which it was spoken and the broader systemic changes it advocates.

In the webinar, my focus was on how staff wellness in corrections is often treated as an afterthought—an "elective" rather than a fundamental priority, perhaps following adverse events, litigation, or public embarrassment. Historically, staff wellness initiatives are considered only if there is surplus budget, in response to contract negotiations, or as a reaction to adverse incidents linked to staff functioning. This reactive approach highlights a critical oversight: the failure to prioritize staff wellness from the outset, despite its central role in the effective operation of correctional facilities.

As we navigate the complexities of 2024, it is startling that many agencies still fail to invest in staff wellness as a primary concern. This situation brings to mind the religious practice of tithing, where individuals dedicate the first 10% of their income to spiritual or communal purposes, under the belief that this is the right thing to do to those in need, and the expectation that generosity will lead to even greater blessings to the giver. Applying this analogy to staff wellness, one can envision a paradigm shift where agencies prioritize their resources towards the well-being of their employees in the same manner—something like 10% off the top, in some fashion.

Consider the transformative outcomes if correctional systems adopted this "tithing" approach to staff wellness. Imagine that upon approving the annual budget, the foremost priorities included a thorough evaluation of policies for their impact on staff wellness. What if the initial contracts focused on programs that enhance resilience and provide education about the impact of correctional work on staff and their families? What if peer support programs for staff were given the same importance as re-entry programs for

the incarcerated? What if agencies devoted equal effort to dispelling myths about mental health and promoting Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) as they did to creating agendas for reducing recidivism?

Such a shift represents a proactive, offense-oriented strategy rather than the reactive, defense-oriented approach often seen. Investing in staff wellness from the outset is not just a moral imperative but a financially sensible approach. Preventative measures tend to be more cost-effective than addressing issues after they arise. For instance, improving staff satisfaction and reducing burnout can lead to lower turnover, decreased absenteeism, and enhanced job performance, all contributing to more stable and efficient operations.

The implications of this perspective extend beyond operational metrics. Staff well-being directly affects the quality of interactions, communication, and decision-making within correctional facilities. The effectiveness of any policy or program that is designed to promote rehabilitation and a successful reentry is inherently linked to staff capability. Therefore, prioritizing staff wellness enhances the overall effectiveness of the correctional system's mission.

When asked about data points for a staff wellness program, my standard response is, “What is the agency data telling you?” This question leads to a comprehensive examination of several key indicators:

1. **Staffing:** Do individuals want to work here? Analyzing recruitment and retention rates provides insight into staff satisfaction and overall agency appeal.
2. **Reputation:** Are leaders aware of their reputation and the reputation of their facilities? How administration is perceived impacts staff morale and trust in the organization, which in turn impacts recruitment and retention.
3. **Critical Incidents:** How do potentially preventable use-of-force incidents occur? Evaluating the context, including short-staffing, overtime, and training gaps, helps identify and possibly remedy and prevent underlying issues affecting staff performance.
4. **Workplace Culture:** Are there staff issues like harassment, bullying, grievances, or staff suicides that can rattle the culture? Assessing how these are addressed reveals the health of the workplace environment and the effectiveness of existing policies.
5. **Turnover:** Is there a meaningful exit interview process that helps departing employees feel psychologically safe enough to provide the agency with candid data? Analyzing such feedback helps agencies address concerns and improve retention.
6. **Training:** Are staff investments holistic, focusing on both skill-building and well-being? High-quality training should enhance both job proficiency and personal health.

7. **Policy:** Are policies outdated or misaligned with staff wellness goals? Regular reviews ensure that policies support employee retention and well-being.
8. **Operations:** Have minor changes been considered for significant impact? Small adjustments can often yield substantial improvements in staff morale and efficiency.
9. **Leadership:** Is the importance of staff wellness communicated and modeled throughout the organization? Leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone for wellness initiatives.

As my colleague Greg Morton aptly stated, “All roads means ALL roads.” This statement underscores the comprehensive nature of the approach needed. Prioritizing staff wellness is not merely about implementing isolated programs, but about integrating wellness considerations into every facet of agency operations. By doing so, correctional systems can enhance their effectiveness, foster a healthier work environment, and ultimately better serve both staff and the populations they manage. That is why Desert Waters has built **SafetyNet Accreditation™**, the one-of-a-kind correctional staff wellness accreditation program. SafetyNet is designed to help agencies implement data-driven wellness programming, instead of engaging in piecemeal efforts or the “flavor of the month.”

If we know your road is going to end up at staff wellness, why not go ahead and program the GPS to go there first?



HOW MANY APPLES ARE IN A SEED?

BY LT. DOUG B.

This is an example of changes individual correctional employees can choose to make in their personal and family life to bring about positive outcomes for themselves and their loved ones, and by extension for their workplace. (Personal life “comes” to work just as much as work life “comes” home. Usually, not much is left at the gate, either way.)

Corrections Fatigue is a real thing, and it had a big hold on me. So what did I do about it? I disconnected somewhat emotionally from work and plugged in to enjoying my family more. I sought out guidance and purpose and began meeting regularly with a very wise mentor from my church family. I found purpose and joy in choosing to live for others and not so much for myself. For my self-care, I began engaging in new hobbies which allow me to see tangible results that I can't always see at work. I began cooking and smoking food, and learning about woodworking that I found I enjoyed after working on some awesome pinewood derby cars with my son. I began working to restore old cars and bringing them back to life and using these and other examples in teaching good life lessons to the kids (and myself).

I had to work on making sure that home life was very different from work life. I had to ensure there were goals to attain at home, and not just maintaining the status quo like work life can often be. That way I couldn't be my work personality at home. This made that switch from work to home easier to flip and allowed less carryover when leaving Job #2 to engage in Job #1.

Work no longer gets all the fruit leaving only the peel for my family. It's a daily task to keep that balance and I'm not perfect at it, but the fruit that my family gets from me now, is so much more than what I gave them before. Part of our jobs as humans investing in other humans is to plant seeds and help produce good fruit. When we focus less on how many seeds are in an apple, and more on how many apples are in a seed, our movement towards staff wellness will go a very long way. Be well and keep stepping forward!

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE IT BETTER?

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

This article is an example of how individual choices can have wide-ranging effects, starting with overcoming a sense of “learned helplessness.”

One key focus of our course, **“From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™”** (CF2F), is empowering staff by constantly asking, “What can YOU do to help improve ___?” (Whatever an area of concern may be.) This question applies to all correctional employees, from frontline staff to wardens and Executive Directors/Commissioners. While each role has different levels of authority and influence, everyone’s contributions are essential for meaningful and lasting progress in criminal justice reform.

However, initially class participants may feel stumped by that question. It may not have occurred to them that there ARE actions THEY can take (no matter how seemingly small or insignificant) to move the needle to a greater positive. Why might that be?

When people (or animals) find themselves in situations where they are unable to escape chronically traumatic or other high stress conditions, they develop what psychologists have called learned helplessness¹. They lose hope. They come to believe that there is nothing that they can do to end their distressing circumstances. So, they may resign themselves to what to them is their inescapable fate, perhaps resorting to blaming and complaining as their main coping mechanism, or just trying to endure.

It is no secret that corrections work can be draining. It can crush those involved spiritually and psychologically, and eventually physically as well. Could correctional staff subjected to a barrage of chronic and unavoidable stressors end up experiencing learned helplessness? Yes, I believe that this can happen. And when a resigned mindset sets in, people don’t even try to think about ways to take steps towards positive change. The ability to problem-solve effectively diminishes, and the distress experienced increases. People may just hang in there, trying to endure, or they give up.

Our perspective and our experience at Desert Waters is that even if we may not be able to change the big picture, there ARE things that we can do help ourselves and even those around us.

Here are some examples of how this can work at the individual level:

Nutrition: We control what we eat, which affects our physical and mental health. Research shows that good nutrition, along with managing alcohol and tobacco use, impacts overall well-being.

Physical Activity: We can decide how active or sedentary we are, influencing our health and even life expectancy.

Sleep: We have control over our sleep habits when not working, impacting our overall health.

Mental Health: We can choose what we focus on outside of work, how well we take care of our needs, and how we engage in activities, which affects our mental well-being.

Social Interactions: We control how we treat others and build relationships both at home and work, impacting our social connections.

Attitude: We can decide how we view situations, which helps shape our attitude and our perspective.

Meaning and Purpose: We can choose where to find meaning and purpose in our lives, which contributes to our overall sense of fulfillment.

Let's all choose to make empowering choices, regardless of job role and rank, from line staff to administrators, at home and at work. And we at Desert Waters aspire to practice what we preach. That is why when we saw a need in the arena of corrections staff wellness, we responded. We felt graced with the call to do so, and we trusted that there was something we could do to help, no matter how small it seemed against the vast oceans of need. So today, twenty-one years later, we are grateful to say that we are still being empowered to listen to staff and their families; design and deliver wellness curriculum; conduct research; build **SafetyNet Accreditation™**, our staff wellness accreditation program; publish books; and send out the Correctional Oasis every month.

What CAN YOU do to help improve what falls within your sphere of influence? And what WILL you do to achieve that?

¹Seligman, M. E., & Maier, S. F. (1967). Failure to escape traumatic shock. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 74(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0024514>



FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILMENT™

Online Instructor Training

Send your vetted staff to become certified CF2F instructors to offer **staff healthy, research-based, career-long coping skills.**

**October 22-25 &
28-30, 2024**

[MORE INFORMATION](#)



Click or scan the code to register.



SELF-PACED TCF IS HERE!

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

This is another example of what administrators can do to help improve the well-being and functioning of new hires, and as a result, also help the odds of their retention over time.

This scenario probably plays out daily in countless jurisdictions. You're about to start offering basic training at your correctional agency's Training Academy. Among your new recruits you have Bob who up to a few days ago worked at the local Walmart, Mary who a couple of months ago graduated from high school, and Todd whose only prior job experience involves working at fast-food joints and delivering pizzas. Now you are training them to become tomorrow's Correctional or Detention Officers. You try to prepare them with training on topics such as CPR/First Aid, Defensive Tactics, use of force, OC spray training, ethics and professionalism, offender disciplinary procedures, and many more.

Other than what they may have seen on TV or in a movie, these individuals and many others in your class have no knowledge of what working in a prison or jail is about, what to expect, and how to best deal with what they'll be facing. Yet, typically they receive no information and no tools for comprehending and coping with the conditions and the culture they are about to encounter inside. In may not be surprising then that after a couple of years on the job, less than half of the new hires may still be serving at the correctional agency that employed them and which spent many thousands of dollars training them.

That is why we at Desert Waters aim to prepare new hires at the psychological level and equip them to some degree at least for what they are about to experience at work, and how that can impact them both on and off the job, and what they can do about it.



To accomplish that we offer the 4-hour in-person course Towards Corrections Fulfillment™ (TCF), and we also train instructors to offer that course to new hires at the Academy or elsewhere. TCF is a prequel to the award-winning and internationally recognized course CF2F.

We now also offer TCF as a self-paced, interactive online course, taking about 2.5 hours to complete. Academies can purchase licenses annually for new hires. Considering the high cost of training and turnover rates, investing in TCF is a clear choice. Retaining even one new hire makes a significant difference, and the boost in morale and team cohesion is invaluable.

Contact us for more information on TCF and to how to get the **Self-Paced** version of the course in your Academy.



INSTRUCTOR TRAINING



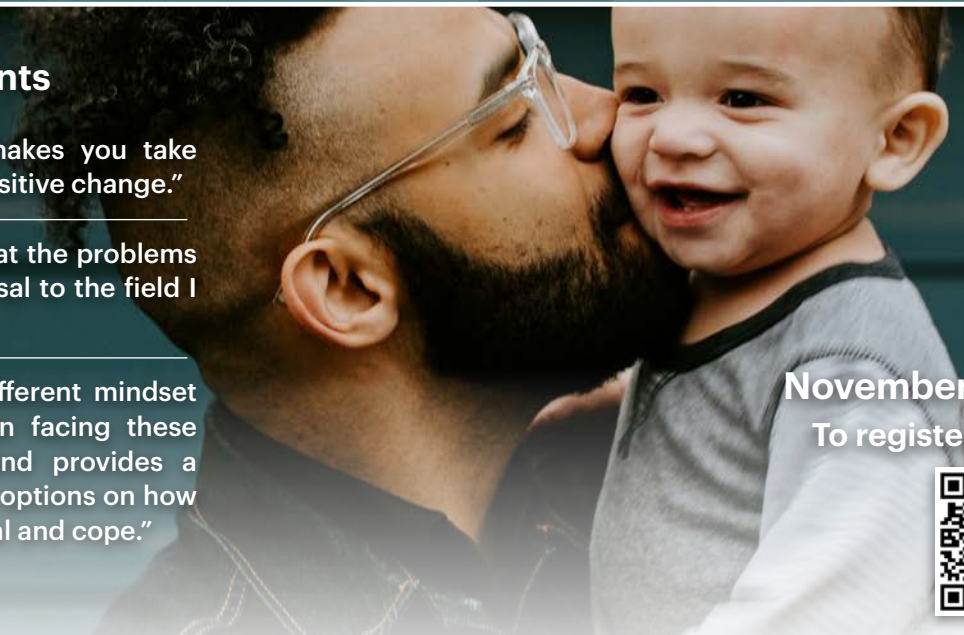
SEND YOUR VETTED STAFF TO GET CERTIFIED TO TEACH THESE COURSES TO COWORKERS AND ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS!

Course Comments

"Informative and makes you take responsibility for positive change."

"To hear and see that the problems I deal with is universal to the field I work in."

"This provides a different mindset and mentality when facing these issues head on, and provides a handful of different options on how to appropriately deal and cope."



November 13-15 & 18-20
To register (scan or click):



Desert Waters' 6-hour proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness - For Staff™" (CFW-S) presents an overview of potential negative impact of correctional work on family members due to: (a) lifestyle changes that affect the family because their loved one works in correctional settings, and (b) negative behavioral changes that staff may undergo as a result of their working in corrections. The course also presents the fundamentals of effective strategies for addressing these challenges, and introduces the basics of positive practices for family care and for emotional closeness.

TARGET AUDIENCE

New and seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) of all disciplines and job roles.

COURSE TOPICS

- When Family Members Enter Our Corrections World
- How Our Families May Be Impacted When Job Requirements Affect Family Life
- Work-to-Home Stressors
- Help for Our Families: Issues and Suggestions
- Helping Our Families Understand Our Negative Changes
- Family Care Practices



Desert Waters' 6-hour proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness - For Families™" (CFW-F) presents information to adult family members about how corrections work realities can impact family life, and provides suggestions for dealing with scenarios commonly experienced by correctional families. This highly interactive course is designed to be offered to adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole), and also to adult family members of new staff. A 2-hour version is available for families of new staff.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Adult family members of new correctional staff and adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) of all disciplines and job roles.

COURSE TOPICS

- Corrections Work Realities
- When Work Comes Home
- What Might My Loved One Face at Work?
- Help for the Family
- The Basics of Self-care
- Family Scenarios



BUCKET OF ROCKS OR TOOLBOX?

BY CO JANE

This is an example of changes individual correctional employees can choose to make in their attitude and behavior to bring about positive outcomes in the workplace.

It saddens me that many correctional workers carry a bucket of rocks to work every day and don't even realize that they are carrying needless weight. You have heard the old saying, "Attitude is everything." Well, in this article I'm talking about people who carry buckets with rocks of negative attitudes.

I continue to hear over and over again about problems in corrections that are a direct result of the "bucket of rocks" people bring in with them. These rocks can kill careers, steal lives, and destroy families. What are some of the rocks I am talking about? They are gossip, harassment, jealousy, anger, hate, back-biting, and too many more to mention.

What is wrong with this picture? Aren't we supposed to be supporting each other? Don't we all depend on others for support in emergencies? Yet when the crisis is over, we go back to throwing our rocks.

I know this is not a perfect world. If it were there would be no need for corrections. However, people have to begin to realize that they will either be a positive role model to inmates and staff or a negative one. Too many times we see the results of the "rock" that has been hurled at someone, with no consideration about how it will affect the other person. Most of us have failed to realize that in work and life in general "it's not about me."

We take great pride in the fact that we go into these facilities on a daily basis and protect the public. Our jobs are not easy. We have one strike against us though before we even go in. IT IS NEGATIVE IN THERE!!!! It is one thing when inmates are negative. We expect that. It is very discouraging when staff is more negative than the inmates. There is something terribly wrong with this!

So, we have a choice. Do we let the negative rub off on us or do we choose to release the positive into our workplace?

The question of course is how to change this negativity. How do we motivate ourselves and others to change, or better yet, to be transformed? (I heard it said that change is repeatable, but transformation is permanent.) What I want to see in corrections is permanent transformation in our attitude, not just change that doesn't stick.

Thankfully, in my career I had the opportunity to work with and for some very positive role models. They showed me the way to positive transformation. These people impacted the atmosphere so that it felt better just to be in the same room with them. They had nice things to say about coworkers, other staff, and other departments. They set the standard wherever they went. They didn't sit around and talk negatively or complain about their plight for working in a prison. They took their job seriously, but were also able to laugh at themselves. They made going into this negative environment bearable. You liked being with them. They brought unity to their department.

What was their secret? I believe that it was that they realized that "it's not about me." And because of that they carried what I call their handy-dandy tool box, instead of a bucket of rocks. In their tool box they kept some very important tools of the trade.

First of all, they carried their ID. They knew who they were, what they represented, and what their job was. They never tried to be something that they were not. They did not question what their assignment or purpose was behind the walls. They were secure in themselves and never had the need to put others down to feel superior.

Secondly, they carried keys on a key ring, and used them effectively in the area to which they were assigned. These keys helped them do their jobs safely and efficiently. The keys reminded them of the responsibility they had for themselves and others, and so they operated with integrity. These workers were also door openers for other staff, helping them succeed and advance. They encouraged others and didn't keep a written record of what was done wrong. Rather, they were quick to note the good about their staff and coworkers.

Thirdly, they carried a radio. They were outstanding communicators. You knew what they expected of you and you were encouraged by them to do your best. They made you want to do a good job, because they were quick with praise and slow with criticism.

They knew how to change an environment with the words they chose to use. They realized how important communicating was and never expected you to read their mind. They gave good direction and did not make anyone feel less than because they didn't understand something. To them there was no such thing as a stupid question.

Finally, they carried a flashlight. Their flashlight helped them see, really see. These people were outstanding at seeing a situation the way it was and bringing light into it when necessary. They never operated out of dark emotions like anger, hate, frustration, or jealousy. They also brought light and resolution into areas where there had been misunderstanding. They even offered to be your advocate if necessary when you had a problem. And they were great at helping you see the flip side of things.

These people never, never carried a bucket of rocks. **They understood that life is not about them, but about what they can do to make it better for everybody.** They have realized that giving is much more rewarding than taking.

Wouldn't corrections facilities be much better to work at if more staff went in carrying their tool box instead of a bucket of rocks?

NEW DESERT WATERS HATS

Get a new hat with the Correctional Officer flag and Desert Waters' logo, and support Desert Waters with your donation!
You have two versions to choose from.



Click or Scan to place your order

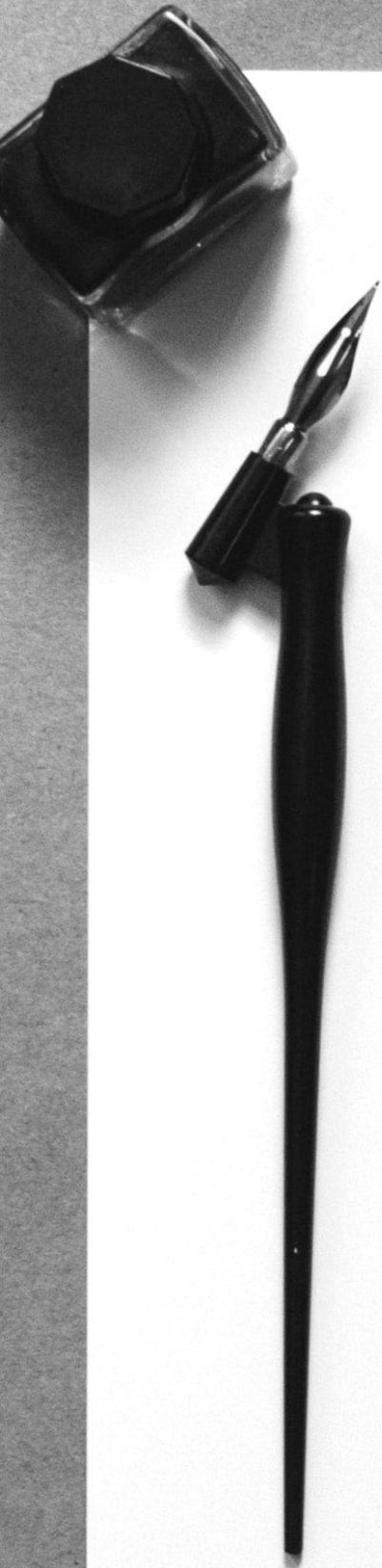


QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“One of the greatest obstacles to your growing is the fear of making a fool of yourself. Any real step forward implies the risk of failure. And the really important steps imply the risk of complete failure.... We have to have the courage to make fools of ourselves, and at the same time be awfully careful not to make fools of ourselves.”

Thomas Merton





IN MEMORIAM

Marc Fischer
Mailroom Supervisor
USP Atwater
Federal Bureau of Prisons

MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



CATERINA SPINARIS, PH.D., LPC
Founding Director

CONTENT CURATION, PRODUCTION & EDITING



STEPHANIE RAWLINGS, M.S.
Deputy Director

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT, EDITING



JUDY MYERS, B.SC.
Executive Assistant

EDITING



STEVEN MAYOTTE, B.DES., LEED AP
Operations & Systems Advisor

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in the Correctional Oasis are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views and opinions held by DWCO Board members, staff, and/or volunteers. DWCO is not responsible for accuracy of statements made by authors. If you have a complaint about something you have read in the Correctional Oasis, please contact us.

Mission

Advancing the well-being of correctional and other public safety staff and their families, and the health of correctional and other public safety agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training

admin@desertwaters.com
desertwaters.com
(719) 784-4727

Support Desert Waters Correctional Outreach

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being of corrections staff and other public safety professionals, and to also assist their families. Contributions by individuals like you enable us to offer some services at no cost, and to keep our products affordable for agencies. Consider joining us in our mission by making a tax-deductible **donation** today. Thank you for your support!

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional and other public safety agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

All images are stock images or are presented with permission of the author.

