

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH  
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF

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From The Old Screw

## You Are Never Too Old To Learn Something New!

I learned something new today...me, who thought I had heard everything. I learned that there are people out here that really care about us. Common people like us. People that will take time out of their personal lives to pray for the Staff in different facilities in this State. I found out that these people go to high places next to a facility and pray for Staff and their safety. This is not only for State Corrections, but Federal BOP, too. At times we all need all the help we can get. (I'm not the most religious person in the world; but I do believe that Someone looked out for me for my entire Corrections career.) Everyone has the

right to believe or not, that is their choice. I just thought it was neat that people, not preachers or such, take the time to think of us. Of course you don't have to go to high places to pray or wish safety for Staff of Corrections. Just stopping for a minute and thinking of all the people who are in danger everyday shows that you care. These are hard times, what with the war, budget cuts and staff shortages. To have non-corrections people care for us gives me hope that someday more people will be aware of the fine people of corrections.

Take Care,  
*The Old Screw*

## The Corrections Image

*From email by a jail professional.*

For some reason the corrections profession is still looked down on by the outside law enforcement agencies. Even though corrections is now a specialized field, the mentality still exists that it's just a lock and key operation—busting heads, locking inmates in, and fighting with them all the time. Hello world, it has changed so much over the past 25 years, it's ridiculous. Besides the different hats you must wear and swap on a minute by minute basis, there are laws and rules and policies and procedures to follow,

civil rights suits, specialized information units. What a change I have seen in the past 25 years! It isn't what it used to be. But, the slob image of *lock 'em up and throw away the key* persists. It should be mandatory to work in a jail for six months before being placed in a law enforcement unit to see what is going on. That would give police officers and patrol sheriff's deputies a better appreciation of the work done in Corrections and reduce the stress a bit from outside law enforcement agencies.

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### ABOUT DESERT WATERS

Desert Waters is a Colorado 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with the mission to increase the occupational, personal and family well-being of corrections and detention staff.

We operate independently of any government agencies or correctional corporations.

Desert Waters is funded through individual and corporate donations, grants, fundraising events, and training, consulting and counseling fees.

We serve staff and their families in several ways.

Our 24/7 hotline, the Corrections Ventline, is **anonymous, confidential and free of charge**. It includes one free phone consultation with a counselor. Face-to-face counseling is offered on a low-fee, cash basis. (Health insurance is not billed.) Coping and interpersonal skills trainings are offered to facilities or groups for a fee or through grants.

## From Caterina's Desk

## Permission To Be Human

*From email by a corrections officer.*

So many times I hear from people here and in other jails that their peers would see them as unsafe to work with, or a "wus," if they went to see a shrink since they couldn't handle the work load and needed help from the outside. This barrier to getting help adds more stress and a need to try to find ways to escape from the real world. A temporary physical fix and a faux mental fix—here go the alcohol, drugs, a diversion with the opposite sex or same sex, violence at home (seen lots of displaced aggression in this field), and the list goes on, only to have to deal with a double dose of the real world later on plus guilt for escaping to their "make believe" world.

No "wus"

Dear No "wus:"

There is an entrenched misconception among corrections staff that to be fit for the job you must show that nothing affects you, no matter how upsetting or gruesome. Corrections professionals however are often exposed to "ugliness" that causes intense emotions, such as hate, dread, or horror. The "ugliness" eventually distorts staff's core beliefs about people and the world. Add to that mix curve balls that life on the outside may throw at them—relationship difficulties, money problems, health challenges—and you end up with a handful. Any living, breathing person would be affected in some way, anywhere from being distressed to shutting down emotionally.

The key is learning how to defuse the impact of adversity effectively, not to deny its reality.

To stay on track, staff needs to have ways to process negative experiences, to make sense out of them or to neutralize them in their minds. Staff also needs to be equipped with useful options, including effective ways to calm themselves down and ways to manage conflict. This could be done in several ways, including monthly presentations at the workplace where relevant subjects are addressed and discussed. **Staff needs to be given permission to be human.**

For some staff, confiding in a colleague or a spouse acts as a relief valve, as long as mental health issues are not serious. For others, speaking with a minister is just as effective. If depression, anxiety or other distress persists, a consultation with a mental health provider or actual treatment is in order. Talking with trusted professionals helps staff keep short accounts and promotes the repair of damaged core beliefs. (No, not everyone is a con, evil does not win in the end, and you are not a coward because you felt scared.) Sometimes medication makes a big difference for the better.

So, keep spreading the word: Smart, dependable staff recognize when they need help and are not afraid to get it.

*Caterina*

### DESERT WATERS TRAININGS

On September 21, two trainings were offered at the annual Missouri Correctional Association, *Stress Busting* and *Making Conflict Work for You*. Thirty staff attended the workshops at the beautiful Lake of the Ozarks. Thank you Lt. Margo Hurse of Jackson County Detention Center for being instrumental in our being invited to present at the conference!

Three trainings on *Stress Busting* were presented at Sterling Correctional Facility on September 28. Fifty-nine staff attended. Thank you, Lt. Brian Whitney, for coordinating this outreach to staff.

A four-hour pilot workshop on *Treating Criminal Justice Personnel* offered in Denver on October 6 was attended by five mental health providers .

The workshop, *Sweetening Your Relationship*, on ways to improve interactions and communication with one's significant other, was offered by the Affirmative Employment Committee at the Federal Correctional Complex in Florence on October 18. Twenty-eight staff and partners attended. The workshop was preceded by a brownie contest with several entries of the most scrumptious brownie recipes! Thanks to Debby Bradfield and Jean Edwards for this Valentine's Day in October.

## Cultural Diversity Awareness

*From email sent by a veteran correctional officer.*

We are situated in New York State. So many different people come through our facility, it staggers the mind. I have stood and watched in awe as a line officer pepper-sprayed an individual because the inmate invaded his “space” bubble. The officer’s interpretation was that the inmate became aggressive.

When all was said and done, and after a review of the inmate’s identification as well as his name (big giveaway) and accent, and after discussion with the inmate, I was finally able to determine that the man was of recent Turkish descent. I have visited the Middle East on a number of occasions and if a male wasn’t talking two inches away from your face and letting you smell his breath, you had a problem. Close contact was a cultural norm for this person and was misconstrued as an aggressive action on the officer’s part. Some simple indicators would have alerted this officer that there could be a reason for his actions and how to handle him. He was not becoming violent via his body language.

Needless to say, the officer had an Article 75 hearing for excessive force and bought 10 days on the beach. The administration’s stance was he should

have known. How could he know if he was never taught?

It’s the same with Hasidics (*members of a Jewish religious movement*) here. We have a large Hasidic population in this county. Being touched or questioned by a female officer offers some resistance, but this is a cultural issue. Taking a Muslim’s Quran or kufi (*short rounded cap traditionally worn by Muslims*) and tossing it on the intake table, not a good idea. The list goes on.

We now offer real time one-on-one mentoring in the intake department and let these guys and gals know, hey watch for this and watch for that. There is a difference between aggressive actions denoted by body language and a cultural norm. Up in Northern and Western NY this is unheard of but we are spreading the word with blips of notes here and there, conversations, topics brought up at training meetings, etc. **The administration should be offering training in cultural diversity, not just based on a black/white/hispanic level but expand it to include many cultures.** We are making some headway. Hopefully we can stave off another officer being blasted with unpaid time off or worse.

## Quotes From *Confronting Confinement*

For all of the hard work and achievements of corrections professionals—most of which the public does not hear about—there is still too much violence in America’s prisons and jails, too many facilities that are crowded to the breaking point, too little medical and mental health care, unnecessary uses of solitary confinement and other forms of segregation, a desperate need for the kinds of productive activities that discourage violence and make rehabilitation possible, and a culture in many prisons and jails that pits staff against prisoners and management against staff. There is too little help and hope for the individuals we incarcerate and too little respect and support for the men and women who work in our prisons and jails. (p. 8)

In correctional facilities around the country, there are stark differences and a dehumanizing disconnection between the people who are incarcerated and the men and women sworn to protect and supervise them. Those differences involve race, culture, class, gender, and the difference between rural and urban America. The best corrections leaders are developing cultural competence within their institutions, but unless that practice spreads, America’s prisons and jails will do more harm than good. (p. 10)

Congress and state legislatures have passed laws that dramatically increased prisoner populations without providing the funding or even the encouragement to confine individuals in safe and productive environments where they can be appropriately punished and, for the vast majority who are released, emerge better citizens than when they entered.... We should be astonished by the size of the prisoner population, troubled by the disproportionate incarceration of African-Americans and Latinos, and saddened by the waste of human potential. (p.10)

<http://www.prisoncommission.org/report.asp>

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization  
for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

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### BLOGS

<http://desertwaters.blogspot.com>  
<http://womenincorrections.blogspot.com>

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For Your Support!**

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## Stress? What Stress?

The question is not whether you're experiencing stress on the job, but rather, how you end up handling it. Dr. Don Steele's booklet, **Stress Management for the Professional Correction Officer**, can help you identify "sane" ways to deal with work-related frustrations and pressures. Clear and to the point, it is ideal for use by Lieutenants and Sergeants who wish to support and build bonds with their team. For more information or to order, please go to [www.steelepublishing.com](http://www.steelepublishing.com), email at [SteelePub@aol.com](mailto:SteelePub@aol.com), or call 508-339-6760.

## Colorado Combined Campaign

Desert Waters staff and volunteers have been busy introducing our services to staff in many Colorado Correctional facilities. We presented at roll calls at Arkansas Valley, Cañon Minimum Centers (Arrowhead, Four Mile and Skyline), Centennial, Colorado State Penitentiary, Fremont, Fort Lyon, La Vista, San Carlos, and Trinidad.

### DOCUMENTARY

Desert Waters staff and volunteers were interviewed on camera for a documentary on prison staff by Michael Wolfe and John Cordova for a Mass Communication class project at CSU-Pueblo.