

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

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From CO Jane

## Are We “Emotional Retards?”

After you work in a prison for a while you don't even realize you are stuffing most of your feelings and not dealing with them. Stuffing is the expected behavior. This is what is considered NORMAL. You don't even notice that anger is the only emotion you are good at anymore.

For me, it is hard to describe what I mean without using the term “emotional retard.” After years of working in prisons I got “emotionally retarded.” I didn't even know it until after I retired. I never recognized that I no longer felt or enjoyed things like I used to. I was suspicious of people outside my co-workers. I overreacted with my kids over stupid stuff, like spilling a drink or not doing what I told them to do when I told them to do it. I had no patience or tolerance for not following the rules, even when it meant letting go of good friends. Sound familiar?

I can look back now and see where I reacted to my children and my spouse like I would react to the inmates at work. I stayed in high stress and high adrenaline mode 24 hours a day. I didn't sleep soundly anymore and I was continuously frustrated with something or someone. I had no good hobbies. Instead I had a lot of bad habits. I cussed like a sailor and saw everything in my life in a negative light. This was a very sad place to live. I didn't understand what was wrong and why I wasn't happy.

I had advantages though. My husband worked in prison too. I don't really think I could have stayed married to a correctional worker if I had not been inside the wall myself. If I hadn't worked there, I would never have understood the challenges correctional staff faces on a daily basis. In what other job, other than other branches of law enforcement, do

you worry about coming home in one piece? No wonder statistics show a high number of alcohol/drug related problems, high adultery rate and even a high suicide rate in corrections. We have this impossible standard we expect ourselves to live up to, and when we fall or make a mistake, we beat ourselves up mercilessly, because we should have “known better” in the first place.

I have seen some horrific things in the last 18 years while working in corrections, things most people would be literally sick over. Yet, I went through them like a trooper, unscathed—or so I thought. But what I realize now is that my inability to admit that these things really bothered me caused me to become hard and calloused. **What I needed was to experience the emotions I was going through.** I didn't have to do it at work, but I did

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### IN MEMORIAM

Brian Welker  
Correctional Officer  
August 4, 2007

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### UPCOMING DWCO EVENTS AND SERVICES

- DWCO Membership
- DWCO's First Annual Fundraiser Banquet, Tue October 16, The Abbey, Cañon City
- DWCO First Annual Conference on Mental Health Needs of Corrections & Law Enforcement Personnel, Spring 2008, Colorado Springs, CO
- Individualized Week-Long Intensive Psychotherapy Package

## Are We “Emotional Retards?”

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need to express my feelings, talk about them and try and understand my reactions to events and circumstances I was exposed to at work. Instead, I just stuffed my emotions and pretended nothing affected me.

We are special people with special assignments to protect and serve the public, but we are also the most unappreciated branch of law enforcement. The public wants criminals locked up, but they seldom think about who is responsible for keeping them locked up. This is US, ALL OF US, working together. We are a tight-knit group of people who offer a tremendous service to our country.

To continue doing our jobs while remaining healthy we need to learn how take care of ourselves, and how to deal with our feelings and the impact of our job. What we do or experience everyday at work is not normal. We need to learn how to set boundaries and regain balance in our lives if we want to fully enjoy all life has to offer. The first step is to recognize this need. Then we can begin to deal with it in healthier, more productive ways.

## Corrections: From Fatigue To Fulfillment—Part VI

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### MEETING KEYS NEEDS AT WORK

In addition to the need for physical safety, there are six psychological/spiritual needs which must be met—more or less—for corrections staff to remain emotionally healthy and to function at optimal levels in the workplace. These are the needs for emotional safety, trust, power, respect, connection and meaning.

#### Emotional Safety

In emotionally safe environments we expect to receive support when we seek it. We expect to be encouraged and comforted when we are going through tough times. We expect that colleagues will honor our confiding in them and keep our sharing about personal issues to themselves. We also anticipate being corrected in constructive ways when we make mistakes, and to be given helpful tips as to how to improve our performance.

*I don't want you to be wounded by careless or cruel words or actions. Your welfare matters to me.*

#### Trust

Closely related to emotional safety is the need for trust in the workplace. Trust is the glue that bonds people together. Trust grows when supervisors and coworkers are consistent and reliable, when they

keep promises, and when they act in ways that show that they truly have the staff's best interests at heart.

Staff earn trust when, no matter what, they are available to coworkers in an emergency. Trustworthy individuals choose to act honorably and honestly, and stand up for what they know to be right even when it is hard to do so. They do not tolerate exploitation, abuse or victimization of others. Trustworthy individuals are able to let go of old conflicts and grudges, and make genuine attempts to resolve issues with coworkers .

*I want you to experience that you can depend on me and on our team. Your welfare matters to me.*

#### Power

Personal power is about the ability to intentionally impact one's environment through being able to control oneself, make decisions, initiate behaviors, and give input in situations. The legitimate need for appropriate power is met in work environments where leaders are comfortable with delegating responsibilities and with receiving feedback from their subordinates. It is also satisfied where abuses of power, such as harassment of any kind, are not tolerated. Truly powerful leaders also model self-control—the

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## Corrections: From Fatigue To Fulfillment—Part VI

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ability to restrain themselves when provoked or under pressure.

*I want you to be able to exercise your abilities in your areas of authority, and to take initiative appropriately.*

### Respect

The need for respect is based on our yearning to know that we deserve decent and fair treatment. Respect is about exhibiting an unconditional positive regard towards others, valuing them, and demonstrating that we consider them worthy of our esteem. Respect is shown through our language, facial expression and tone of voice. It is also shown in our actions, the ways we choose to treat people.

*I want you to know you are appreciated and valued.*

### Connection

We are social creatures. We do need relationships where we can take our masks off to varying degrees and let others see the true "us." Attachments are vital to our well-being. Given how many hours we spend at work every week, it is important that our need for connection be met appropriately and ethically on the job. Understanding, collaboration and support are the outcomes of connecting with co-

workers within professional boundaries.

*I want you to know that you belong, you are included, and you are part of the team.*

### Meaning

In addition to being social beings, we are also meaning-making creatures. We need to know that what we do has significance, that it impacts our world in beneficial ways and leads to the meeting of worthwhile goals. Corrections staff need to be shown regularly and through examples how their efforts make a lasting positive difference in others' lives (staff or inmates), and that what they do is important in the grand scheme of things.

*I want you to find fulfillment through your work, be all you can be, and make a positive difference.*

The above six needs are interrelated. Satisfying one impacts one or more of the rest. And frustrating one interferes with the satisfaction of the remainder.

When staff work toward meeting these needs in the workplace, they end up communicating LOVE to one another. That boosts morale because, as Karl Menninger stated, "*Love is the basic need of human nature, for without it, life is disrupted emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically.*"

## Trainings, Grants, Etc.

### TRAININGS

Caterina presented workshops at both the winter and summer American Correctional Association conferences this year. At the Conference in Tampa she taught on *Staff Suicide: Prevention, Intervention & Postvention*. 39 staff attended. At the 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress of Correction in Kansas City she taught on *Professional Boundaries for Women Working in Corrections*. 65 staff attended.

On October 26 Caterina will train mental health clinicians of the Colorado Department of Corrections on the subject of *Vicarious Traumatization of Correctional Mental Health Staff*.

### GRANTS

We were blessed to receive the following grants:  
**Colorado Health Foundation Rural Regranting Program**, \$1,000 for the Corrections Ventline™  
**Kenneth King Foundation**, \$1,500 for general operating expenses  
**Wal-Mart Foundation**, \$400 as a matching grant for general operating expenses

### DWCO HELPING U.S. TROOPS IN IRAQ

We are honored to report that since June 2007 DWCO has been offering assistance through its educational materials to U.S. military members serving as guards in detention camps in Iraq.

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

**Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

P.O. Box 355  
Florence, CO 81226  
(719) 784-4727

[DESERTWATERS@DESERTWATERS.COM](mailto:DESERTWATERS@DESERTWATERS.COM)

[WWW.DESERTWATERS.COM](http://WWW.DESERTWATERS.COM)

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## MANY THANKS!

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### BLOGS

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

**We thank you for partnering with us through your membership! Helping US helps YOU & YOURS!**

**The Corrections Ventline™**  
**1-866-YOU-VENT**  
**(866.968.8368)**  
[youvent@desertwaters.com](mailto:youvent@desertwaters.com)

### DWCO's First Annual Fundraiser Banquet FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS & CORRECTIONS

We cordially invite you to attend our First Annual Fundraising Banquet and silent auction!

Guest Speaker: **Mr. Ari Zavaras, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Corrections**

Date: Tuesday, October 16

Time: 5:30pm-8:30pm

Place: Benedict Room, Events Center, The Abbey, Cañon City, 2951 East Hwy 50, Cañon City, CO, 81212.

Tickets: \$30 Individual; \$50 Couple; \$500 Corporate table

We thank our Exclusive Sponsor, the **Credit Union of Colorado**, formerly known as **Colorado State Employees Credit Union**.

Please tear at dotted line and mail with your check. Or pay online <http://desertwaters.com/a-donations.htm>. For additional tickets, contact us at 719-784-4727 or [desertwaters@desertwaters.com](mailto:desertwaters@desertwaters.com).

### "FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS & CORRECTIONS" DWCO BANQUET

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