

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 9

September 2014

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## **Avoid Falling In Love With An Inmate: Corrections Staff's Perceptions of Causes and Solutions for Female Staff Romantic Involvement with Inmates** Alexander, M.E., DM, Coons, L., MA, Chavez III, J.G., MS

### Abstract

Correctional staff becoming romantically involved with inmates is a serious violation of professional ethics. Relationships of this nature create an environment detrimental to both the safety and security of everyone in the facility, including the inmates. This paper focuses on why female correctional staff becomes romantically and sexually attracted to inmates.

To investigate this issue, a research project was completed by surveying the correctional managers and line staff at a 1300-bed county jail. The study looked at staff's perceptions of the following four issues—Low Self-esteem, Inmate Manipulation, Insecure Home Life, and Bad Boy Attraction—as potential causes of female staff's romantic involvement with inmates. The study also examined staff's perceptions of the relative effectiveness of the following four interventions as means of reduction of female staff's romantic involvement with inmates: Enforcement of Current State and/or Federal Laws, Increased Management Involvement, Personal Boundaries Training, and Stricter Institutional Policies. Results suggested that self-esteem issues were perceived to be a cause of romantic ethical violations by female staff, and that gender-specific personal boundaries training for correctional personnel was perceived to be a likely effective intervention to remedy this problem.

### Violating Professional Ethics: The Sexual Attraction to Inmates

High professional and ethical standards in the field of corrections are mandated by policies and federal law. Even so, individuals involved in the industry must constantly be on guard against becoming involved in inappropriate relationships with inmates. Inappropriate relationships have been defined as personal relationships between correctional staff and inmates that are romantic, sexual or economic in nature, with the potential to jeopardize the safety and security of the correctional facility while compromising the integrity of the employee (Worley, Marquart, & Mullings, 2003).

There are three institutional influences that can lead to these types of relationships. First, correctional staff exerts power over inmates by rewarding them for good behavior and penalizing them for inappropriate behavior. Secondly, correctional staff heavily depend on the inmates to accomplish numerous daily functions essential to prison operations. Third and most importantly, correctional staff must work so closely with offenders that the boundary between employees and prisoners can become very blurred (Marquart, Barnhill, & Balshaw-Biddle, 2001).

The blurring of personal boundaries can create a situation for inappropriate relationships between correctional staff, both male and female, to develop. Such relationships can result in several compromising situations, including staff allowing a particular inmate special privileges, staff bringing in contraband, staff having sex with inmates, and staff developing romantic relationships with inmates (Blackburn, Fowler, Mullings, Marquart, 2011). Obviously, these types of behaviors can endanger the safety and security of an institution, thus creating significant challenges for correctional managers.

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## DWCO Services



### Staff/Inmate Inappropriate Relations

The focus of this paper will be on female correctional employees who develop romantic relationships with inmates. The reason this particular topic was chosen is because these types of situations have the potential to produce the most dramatic and even dangerous results. This is not to imply that male staff never participate in inappropriate sexual relationships with female inmates or that even same sex relations cannot develop. They do happen. However, as Marquart, et al. (2001) pointed out, the risk of female employees deviating from acceptable boundaries is much greater than males in gender integrated facilities. For example, 77% of 508 Texas Department of Criminal Justice disciplinary cases involving inappropriate relationships were female correctional officers with male inmates. The correctional industry is a male-dominated work environment. Women employed in male-dominated settings are more likely to experience social-sexual behaviors (e.g., invitations to sex, innuendo, harassment), which can lead to boundary violations in the workplace (Stainback, Ratliff, & Roscigno, 2011).

The aftermath of these types of relationships is normally not like something one would read in a romance novel with a happy ending. In fact, an extremely dramatic and tragic example of the results of such relationships happened in August 2005 involving Jennifer Forsyth and Inmate George Hyatte (Fisher, 2005). Ms. Forsyth had a promising career with the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) as a nurse at Tennessee's Northwest Correctional Complex until she met Inmate Hyatte. Ms. Forsyth became romantically involved with Inmate Hyatte. The relationship was discovered and she lost her career with TDOC. On August 9, 2005, the newly married Jennifer Hyatte assisted her husband, Inmate Hyatte, in escaping from custody by shooting and killing Correctional Officer Wayne Morgan (Fisher, 2005). She is now serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole (Longo, 2007).

Another example was reported in Arapahoe County, Colorado, in March 2007 (Moreno, 2007). Nicole Sue Beal, a staff member of the Arapahoe County Jail was arrested for possession of a 3-inch blade knife while on duty in the maximum security section of the jail. Investigations revealed that Ms. Beal was involved in an "inappropriate relationship" with Inmate Robert Keith Ray, who was facing up to 108 years in prison for multiple murders, and had intended to give the knife to him (Moreno, 2007).

One might say that these examples are extreme and not the normal outcome of these types of relationships. However, even in relationships with less dramatic results, the ending can be devastating. Possible consequences of these relationships include loss of career, criminal charges, loss of family relationships and embarrassment for other employees/managers (Worley, Tewksbury, & Frantzen, 2010). These relationships can bring about physical and emotional harm to the staff member as well as jeopardizing the safety and security of the facility (Cheeseman-Dial and Worley, 2007).

### Possible Causes

One crucial reason these relationships develop after staff members become attracted to inmates is because the staff members now have what they consider to be an "unshareable" problem. That is, they feel they cannot reach out to others for help (Worley & Cheeseman, 2006).

Female correctional workers with poor personal boundaries are at a greater risk of entering into inappropriate relationships, because poor boundaries make them more vulnerable to violating their position of trust (Worley & Cheeseman, 2006). Epstein (1994) explains the concept of personal boundaries and how they allow us to appropriately define our relationships with others. The training all correctional staff receive, combined with common sense, warn them that they should deal with the inmates only on a professional level. However, it seems some may be drawn to men who fall into the category commonly known as "Bad Boys." So what is it that attracts women to these types of men when common sense would tell them otherwise?

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Personal relationship issues place correctional officers at higher risk of boundary violations (Worley & Cheeseman, 2006). Marquart et al. (2001) noted that officers who engage in inappropriate relationship many times have problems such as marital issues, separation anxiety from loved ones, boredom, unrealized dreams and sexual frustration. Inmates are experts at identifying what they perceive as vulnerable or weak staff (Worley, 2012). Female correctional staff with these types of vulnerabilities are open to manipulation by the more dominant male inmates because they appear to be the most masculine and thus may be the most attractive to the females (Bruns, 2012).

Isenberg (1991) studied women who married murderers after they were incarcerated and discovered that almost all of the women she interviewed during her research had been abused by a family member, previous lover, or both. It was her belief that these women felt safer with incarcerated husbands because they could not abuse them (Isenberg, 1991). Ramsland (2004) cited a number of reasons offered by experts about why these women are attracted to these killers. The ones that seemed most applicable are:

- Rescue fantasies: the “Serial Killer Groupies” want to believe that they have the ability to change someone as cruel and powerful as a serial killer.
- Need to nurture: many women have said that they see the little boy in these killers and feel an overwhelming desire to nurture and protect that part of him.
- Need for drama: during the trial, the daily events in the lives of serial killers may attract women who want to get close to the adversarial atmosphere and the possibility that something surprising may occur. (Ramsland, 2004).

Female correctional workers with such tendencies may find it difficult to establish and defend clear professional boundaries. Failure to do so places them at risk of allowing the inmates to gain power over them, which could lead to an inappropriate relationship (Layman, McCampbell, and Moss, 2000).

By virtue of their positions, female officers become supervisors over the inmates placed in their charge. Many times, they have limited or no previous supervisory experience (Michigan, 2009). Therefore, according to social role theory (Bissessar, 2013) their responses may be based more on impulse than on past experiences. Through manipulation, the inmates can reverse the power role so that the female officers lose most, if not all, control over the inmates. The inmates may start out by seeking small favors from the officers. They continue to accumulate these favors until a point of no return. Once this occurs, the inmates take control because the officers fear that their career is in jeopardy (Blackburn, Fowler, Mullings, Marquart, 2011). This can be done by the use of a number of con games inmates have perfected.

### **Attempts to Remedy the Problem**

Many of the people outside of the industry are surprised at the major role women play in adult male cross-gender supervision. They are unaware that female officers are expected to work in any location of the facility and perform every duty that a male officer would with the exception of strip searches (Nink, 2008). There are a number of different work positions, normally referred to as posts, within correctional facilities. Some of these posts require close contact with the inmates with little assistance from other security staff or the presence of supervisory personnel. Examples of such posts are housing officers, work crew officers, food service officers and recreation officers. Other posts, such as count room officers, property officers and control booth officers, have very little to no contact with the inmates. Assigning women only to those low-contact posts might reduce the opportunity for these types of relationships to develop. However, this is not a valid solution for several reasons.

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The first reason gender-designated posts are not acceptable is the many benefits of having women as a significant portion of the correctional workforce. Nink (2008) supported the belief that females working in male prisons create a more normal and calmer atmosphere. A study of 367 male inmates conducted by Cheeseman-Dial and Worley (2008) in four male prisons indicated that female officers were as well-respected, competent in carrying out job duties including issues of security and safety, and as effective as male correctional officers. Inmates may view the female staff in a positive manner due to prior positive interactions with their mothers and female teachers (Cheesman & Worley, 2006).

The second reason security positions in male facilities cannot be segregated based on gender is the number of females that now work in the field. Based on the information reported to the American Correctional Association, there was a 40 percent growth in females in the correctional industry in eight years, rising from 108,913 in 1999 to 152,459 in 2007 (Nink, 2008). Over 80 percent of the 8,528 female correctional officers employed in Texas work in male prison units (Cheeseman and Worley, 2006). The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) reports that it employed 10,351 females, which constitutes 27.2 percent of the FBOP workforce (United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2012). There are simply not enough limited-contact posts to which such a significant number of female staff could be assigned.

Finally, regardless of one's personal opinion about the role of women in a male prison, this type of employment practice would simply be illegal. The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as amended in 1972, gave women the legal right to seek employment as correctional officers in male prisons. Title VII of the Act prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex and national origins (Farkas & Rand, 1997). It has been determined that the designation of work positions based solely on gender is an act of discrimination. To do so would not only limit the number of females a facility could employ, but would also hinder promotion opportunities for the female correctional officers. Obviously, women are a permanent part of male corrections. As pointed out earlier, male staff become involved in inappropriate relations as well, but the seriousness of the outcomes seem worse in the female staff/male inmate situations, as it appears to occur more frequently than male staff/inmate relationships.

The scope of the problem of sexual misconduct has grown dramatically to the point of receiving attention from correctional organizations, state-level Departments of Corrections and the federal government.

The FBOP was the first agency to define sexual relations between staff and inmates as a crime. The Bureau's original Program Statement 5324.04 titled Sexual Abuse/Assault Prevention and Intervention Programs reads, "Sexual acts or contacts between an inmate and a staff are illegal" (United States Department of Justice, 1997).

The federal government took this a step further by the 108th Congress passing Public Law 108-79: Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003. The signing of this Act by President Bush brought this sensitive topic out of the closet and pushed it to the forefront of correctional issues (Comey, 2005). The law extends the classification of sexual contact between prison staff members and inmates as a crime beyond the federal level to the State and local jurisdictions. Prison rape complaints can now be resolved by prison officials and prosecution authorities at all levels of government (108th Congress, 2003).

The law stands as the legal backing being used by many jurisdictions to strengthen their policies on inappropriate relationships with inmates. Susan McCampbell, president of the Center of Innovative Public Policies, Inc., in Florida, stresses the necessity of making the language of an agency's policies more concise and poignant. Just the statement, "Don't become over familiar with inmates," is not enough (Comey, 2005).

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### Methodology

The quantitative research reported in this paper was completed by surveying the managers and line staff at a 1300-bed county jail, yielding a 43% response rate. Two surveys were administered, a Traits and/or Situation survey, and an Intervention survey. These explored staff's perceptions of possible causes of female staff romantic boundary violations with inmates, and possible interventions. The potential causes listed in the Traits and/or Situation survey were: Low Self-esteem, Inmate Manipulation, Insecure Home Life, and Bad Boy Attraction. The possible options offered in the Intervention survey were: Enforcement of Current State and/or Federal Laws, Increased Management Involvement, Personal Boundaries Training, and Stricter Institutional Policies.

Using a Likert scale of ratings of 1 to 5, items were rated from Most Likely (rating of 1) to Very Unlikely (rating of 5). The data were analyzed by calculating means and percentages.

### Results

#### Causes Survey Analysis

A total of 124 employees responded to the survey. The participants' years of correctional experience ranged from 0.2 to 30 years with a mean of 7.29 years. The group consisted of 81 males with a mean of 6.21 years of experience and 43 females with a mean of 9.33 years of experience.

First, the ratings from the entire sample were examined by looking at the percentages of responses for each category of response. The ratings were assigned a number score with Most Likely being 1 and Very Unlikely being 5. Therefore, the variable receiving the highest number of Most Likely ratings will have the lowest mean.

The variable of Low Self-esteem was rated the primary trait and/or situation perceived to contribute to these inappropriate relationships by receiving 30% of Most Likely and Likely ratings combined, with a mean score of 2.81. Inmate Manipulation was second with 26%, with a mean of 3.39. Insecure or Unfavorable Home Life received 17% of the Most Likely and Likely ratings combined, with the mean of 3.08, and the Bad-Boy Attraction got 13% of the Most Likely and Likely ratings combined, with a mean of 4.08.

The data were then examined by gender to see if males and females rated the variables in similar ways. The male group's percentages of Most Likely and Likely ratings of the variables are as follows:

- Low Self-esteem: 27%
- Inmate Manipulation: 25%
- Insecure Home Life: 17%
- Bad Boy Attraction: 18%

The female group's percentages of Most Likely and Likely ratings of the variables are as follows:

- Low Self-esteem: 36%
- Inmate Manipulation: 27%
- Insecure Home Life: 19%
- Bad-Boy Attraction: 5%

Both genders rated Low Self-esteem as the primary contributor to inappropriate female staff-inmate relationships, with female staff tending to do so more than male staff. The only other notable difference was the way females rated the Bad-Boy Attraction when compared to the male and the total group. Less females than males indicated that they perceived the Bad Boy Attraction to be a cause of inappropriate female staff-inmate relationships. (Continued on page 6)

### **Intervention Survey Analysis**

The survey of possible interventions received 121 responses. The years of correctional experience of the participants ranged from 0.2 to 30 years with a mean of 7.41 years. The group was made up of 79 males and 42 females with means of 6.29 and 9.52 years of experience, respectively.

There are two noteworthy descriptive findings with this survey. The first is the large percentage of Most Likely rating given to the Personal Boundaries Training variable. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the participants were of the opinion that this type of intervention would be most successful in reducing the problem of inappropriate female staff-inmate relationships. The next closest variable was Increased Management Involvement, which only received 17% of the Most Likely ratings. The second noteworthy finding is the percentage of Very Unlikely ratings given to Enforcement of Federal and State Laws. This variable was rated as the least effective intervention by 50% of the participants.

As with the Traits and/or Situation Survey, percentages were calculated for the Intervention Survey for the whole sample and by gender to determine if there were any notable differences between the two genders or the group as a whole.

The same two variables that stood out in the evaluation of the total group, Personal Boundaries Training and Enforcement of Federal and State Laws, were rated very similarly by both genders. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the males and 62% of the females were of the opinion that Personal Boundaries Training would be the most effective intervention. The variable of Enforcement of Federal and State Laws was rated as the least effective intervention by 46% of the males and 60% of the females.

### **Conclusion**

As more women enter the corrections field and, even more important, are employed in adult male facilities, the potential of developing romantic relationships with inmates increases. These violations of ethical and professional standards are so dangerous that top correctional officials at all levels of government are addressing this issue. In response, greater emphasis is being placed on training programs for new hires and in-service training for veteran staff, including top-level facility managers. More stringent policies have been implemented by most agencies. Laws have been passed at both the state and federal levels making sexual or romantic involvement with inmates illegal. Regrettably, however, in spite of the efforts that have been put forth, these relationships still occur.

This research indicates that staff perceive the primary cause of these relationships in the case of female staff and inmates to be low self-esteem. Several studies have produced robust results of self-esteem differences based on gender. Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Rade, and Jaberg (2001) concluded that females are significantly more dissatisfied with their bodies than males, which can lead to self-esteem issues. Alexander-Passe (2006) established that females resort to more emotional and avoidance-based coping, which can result in lower self-esteem, while males normally utilize more task-based coping, which can lead to more normal/healthy self-esteem levels. This raises the question of whether correctional staff should receive gender-specific personal and professional boundaries training, including ways to increase one's self-esteem.

Obviously, more research, time and effort must be spent on dealing with this issue. The number of cases of these inappropriate relationships must be reduced. The costs are just too high. Not only do such relationships threaten the safety and security of everyone within the facility, but also the damage that can be done to the lives of those involved is almost unimaginable. Correctional managers must keep the matter of addressing this challenge high on their priorities list.

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Editor's note: In line with the above, another blog entry entitled *Why Do Women Love the Bad Boy: A Real Bad Boy Causes an Internet Sensation* was published by J.R. Bruns and R.A. Richards II on June 23, 2014. Available at: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/repairing-relationships/201406/why-do-women-love-the-bad-boy-0>

## CCJA's 2014 Harry Tinsley Award

On September 9, 2014, the [Colorado Criminal Justice Association](#) (CJJA) awarded Caterina CCJA's highest honor—the Harry Tinsley Award.



The following is part of what was read during the award ceremony by Warden Ploughe, as submitted by Warden Jones (retired) and Warden Ploughe, both of whom nominated Caterina for the award.

*“Caterina’s vision has expanded from a small office in Florence, Colorado, that served the Fremont County corrections community, to an organization that is known and respected throughout the nation. Her work in this area has encouraged dialogue about the effect of the corrections work environment upon the employees. The staff training program of “From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™” was adopted by the Colorado Department of Corrections two years ago. This program has been accepted by the training participants with open arms. The program offers an innovative approach to staff wellness and development. Many training participants have expressed relief and gratitude after attending the training. Caterina has personally*

*prepared the Colorado trainers and emphasizes the ideals of mentorship, guidance, and humanity. These ideals are the same as those used to describe Harry Tinsley.*

*As we prepared our nomination we received letters of support from various areas including Denver Sheriff’s office, Colorado Department of Corrections staff and from as far away as Massachusetts. The support that Caterina has provided to corrections employees has had a direct effect upon promoting the concept of the criminal justice family. The criminal justice family is easy to see when a tragedy occurs, but this training approach helps to build that same family feeling for all employees, even when they are struggling with the day to day challenges of working in corrections. The professionals that work in Colorado corrections have been fortunate to have benefitted from this ground breaking work, right here in our own region. Caterina has a true ‘calling’ for correctional staff and she embodies the spirit of the Harry Tinsley award.”*

Note from Caterina: I am totally amazed and deeply grateful by the acknowledgment of the value of Desert Waters’ work. To me, this award is about recognizing the fact that **corrections employee well-being is an integral component of “good corrections.”** And I am certain that many employees at CDOC deserved to have received the Harry Tinsley award this year. It was very fitting that, as I was out of town, Ted Tudor, my husband, and Judy Myers, my assistant, accepted the award on my behalf. The work of Desert Waters has always been and continues to be entirely a team effort. And of course I need to add that Desert Waters would not even have been conceived in my mind or come into existence if it were not for the persistent calling of the One who is faithful and true.

## Use TEAMWORK

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*Anonymous contribution from a community corrections employee. Reprinted from the Correctional Oasis June 2007, Volume 4, Issue 9.*

**T**ake responsibility for your own actions instead of blaming others or looking to bolster yourself by diminishing fellow employees.

**E**liminate from your vocabulary the word "I" and focus on "we." This will promote greater team achievements. There is no "I" in teamwork. Yes, you do contribute, and you deserve recognition for your hard work. However, the more a person promotes the team, the better the individual will be appreciated and noticed as well.

**A**ctively promote the notion and belief that corrections personnel are overall good people, instead of focusing your efforts on pointing out the flaws of each individual. Yes, mistakes happen. In your mind as a supervisor or a staff member *first* have faith and belief your people will act appropriately, and, secondly, administer to the errors that surface. Focus on determining facts, instead of listening to mythical assumptions about events.

**M**ind your manners. Be careful not to get bogged down in idle gossip and the pitfalls of the "wagging tongue," because this will invariably come back to haunt you.

**W**isdom comes from experience. The mistakes made along the way contribute to the experience base of the seasoned and respected senior staff. Lessons learned are then passed on to newer personnel. The solutions for avoiding those pitfalls are presented in the policies and procedures of the organization. Remember to give practical explanations for the necessity of specific policies and procedures. Whether mistakes were made by the senior staff or by others is irrelevant. This wisdom through experience can enhance the performance of the individual, and consequently the whole organization.

**O**bservations of individual staff members by all other staff are a necessary precaution for the protection of the individual and to reduce the possible liability of the organization. *We must* be watched. It goes with the territory. However, being watched and monitored are a far cry from being automatically assumed guilty. Observations coupled with staff communication can provide credible responses to allegations, regardless of the source.

**R**espond to any and all informal inquiries about your actions or participation in an event in a positive manner. Permit the continued monitoring of your actions, and volunteer information about events to supervisors and peers to eliminate the possibility of assumptions being blown out of proportion.

**K**now what is going on around you both in terms of the inmates/clients we are monitoring and with other staff. Knowledge of facts counters innuendoes and rumor mongering. Knowledge about events, no matter how trivial, tends to prevent misunderstandings and the semblance of inappropriate behavior. If everything is seen in the light of day, then no one can successfully construe an event as less than professional, unless of course the unprofessional act really did occur. Too often incidents are misconstrued because someone ran with only one side of a story and *others were willing to believe in the worst about a person before they considered or remembered the best about them.*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual North American Correctional and Criminal Justice Psychology Conference June 4-6, 2015, Ottawa, Canada—Call for Papers**

Correctional and Criminal Justice is a specialty area in psychology. As a specialty area, ongoing training and education is important. Cooperative efforts between the Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychological Association, and their respective Criminal Justice Sections put together the first and second North American Correctional and Criminal Justice Psychology Conferences in 2007 and 2011 to meet the needs of researchers in the field and the practitioners who daily face the challenge of a practice within the criminal justice system. Both conferences were a tremendous success and featured well over 200 presentations. We trust you will share our enthusiasm and join us for this conference in 2015!

Plan now to submit your original work. We anticipate the submissions portal to open on October 1, with a December 1, 2014, deadline. In October simply follow the links on our website or Facebook page to submit your concurrent workshop, symposia, or posters presentations.

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# Desert Waters Correctional Outreach



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EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL AND THEIR  
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**Individual donors:** Anonymous donors, TC & Joellen Brown, Colorado Combined Campaign donors, Jeff & Connie Mueller, Kevin & Robin Rivard.

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**Special thanks also go to:** Maren Arbach, Amy Ast, Maureen Buell, Steve Engen, Susan Jones, Angela Kantola, Jeff Mueller, Gary & Aida Ouillette, Pam Ploughe, Jennifer Sanders, Matthew von Hobe.

**THE CORRECTIONS  
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## Quote Of The Month

You have not lived today successfully unless you've done something for someone who can never repay you.

~ John Bunyan

## Occupational Stressors in Corrections NIC White Paper

Authored by DWCO's Mike Denhof, Caterina Spinaris and Gregory Morton as part of NIC Cooperative Agreement 12CS14KM7 <http://nicic.gov/library/028299>

## Coming Soon!



The [Critical Incident First Aid™](#)  
e-learning module

## DWCO Mission

To increase the occupational,  
personal and family well-being of staff of all  
disciplines within the corrections profession.