

The CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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Helping correctional agencies become workplaces of choice where everyone wants to be employed!

A publication of Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, a non-profit for the well-being of corrections staff and their families.

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Ventline Expansion!

Given the unprecedented and extraordinary stressors faced by corrections staff and their families during this COVID-19 season, we are thrilled to announce that starting on the 1st of July 2020, the Ventline will also be available to you by text, in addition to emailing us at **ventline@desertwaters.com**.

And please read **HERE** about the Ventline prior to using this service.

Support the Ventline with Desert Waters' **Challenge Coin Fundraiser!**



Down with a Sickness

By Lt. Bryan Hughes

C OVID-19: a subject I was tired of hearing about and had no intention or interest in writing about. I knew this virus wasn't nearly as serious as we were being told. I knew the government was totally overreacting. I felt like I was being placed on sanction by our Governor. It first started as loss of privileges, and then Top Lock. I just knew this was Government control and overreaching. Until I lost half of my Officers to this sickness. Until an Officer passed away due to this virus. Until several officers were placed on ventilators. Until the facility I work at was obliterated by this virus, and prisoners were being taken out by ambulance daily. Until I got sick and was off work for three weeks.

I don't go to the doctor. I'm stubborn. When I get sick, I just suffer through it, and make my wife miserable. Like with most men, when I get sick it's like the end of the world. I usually joke with my wife when I'm sick and tell her I'm dying. Only this virus turned out to not be a joke. People WERE dying. Not just a few, and not just strangers. A transportation Officer had died. An administrator had died. Prisoners were dying every few

days. More and more staff were missing from work every day. And a civilian friend of mine died from this virus.

I called my doctor, and he sent me to the hospital. Because I was exposed to the virus, I wasn't allowed to physically enter the doctor's office. Because my breathing was not affected severely, the hospital sent me home to quarantine there, and only return if my breathing got worse.

I had a fever of 103 degrees, a pounding headache, all the joints in my body ached, and I've never coughed so hard in my life. These symptoms lasted almost two weeks. I had to stop watching the news, because it was nothing but death and destruction due to the virus. I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I let the worry get in my head and cause a couple panic attacks when I was at my worst. Could this really be the way I'm going to go? All the things I've been through, seen and done in this life, and a virus like the flu was going to be the death of me? My wife walked in the room while I was in the middle of my second panic attack of the week. (I never told her about the first one.) If people have never had a panic attack, it is impossible to explain this experience, and

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Down with a Sickness *cont.*

people will never fully understand what a panic attack is like.

What could be worse than being sick with a virus, stuck at home, quarantined away from the world? GUILT. That's right, GUILT! My officers are walking in that facility every day for a minimum of 8 hours and most likely 16, and I'm not there leading them. They are entering the facility facing an invisible enemy. On top of the fear of catching this virus and taking it home to your loved ones, you also have to maintain the facility to run as smooth as possible with tensions running higher than they have been in many, many years. Tensions have been so high among the prisoners that an uproar is minutes away at all times right now. Lower level facilities are experiencing violence they don't normally have to deal with.

Knowing what my Officers were facing every day, and that I wasn't there leading the charge was hard for me to accept. Although I knew it would be counterproductive for me to be at work, making more people sick, I felt I should have been there as an example of true leadership.

I was encouraged by the number of Officers that texted, called and emailed me to see how I was doing. I expressed my feelings of guilt to everyone that checked on me, and they assured me they understood. My staff reassured me that they knew I would be right by their side if I could.

All the staff checking on me daily probably has done more for my recovery than any medicine did. I have an amazing staff, and I couldn't be prouder of every one of them. That is one thing about Corrections staff that no one can take away from us. When it is time to get serious and take care of business, Corrections staff show up.

If you're a supervisor, let your staff know you're proud of them. Whether they admit it or not, these are stressful times. Probably more stress than many have ever experienced. Those that are stressed and scared are looking to you more than they ever have.

As for my health, I'm better. It's been 5 weeks, and all symptoms are gone except this cough. But I'm back at work where I belong, in the world I know, and with the staff I appreciate more and more every day.

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Free Webinars for Corrections Staff & Their Families

Why These Webinars

The virus COVID-19 is an unprecedented and extreme stressor that threatens corrections employees and their families—YOU—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our webinars are designed to offer you social support and practical strategies for tackling these new challenges at home and at work.



Join Us!

Webinar 1: Correctional Staff Confronting COVID-19
Date: Saturday 30 May 2020; Time: 3-4 pm Pacific, 6-7 pm Eastern
YOU'LL LEARN:

- * WAYS TO DEAL WITH CONCERNS ABOUT THE UNKNOWN
- * WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE EFFECTS OF ONGOING TENSION AND STRESS
- * WAYS TO DECREASE RELATIONAL STRESS AND ENHANCE SOCIAL SUPPORT

Webinar 2: Correctional Families Confronting COVID-19
Date: Saturday 20 June 2020; Time: 3-4 pm Pacific, 6-7 pm Eastern
YOU'LL LEARN:

- * WAYS TO MANAGE ANXIETY OR SADNESS ABOUT UNKNOWN IN THE FUTURE
- * WAYS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF DURING THIS SEASON
- * WAYS TO CARE FOR YOUR LOVED ONES DURING THIS SEASON

Photo credit: Joellen Brown

Webinar Presenters

Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC, Desert Waters' Founding Director
Brent Parker, BA, Desert Waters' Director of Training
Jean Cecile Delozier, MCJPA, Desert Waters' Master Instructor
Jeffrey Rude, Desert Waters' Master Instructor

Please note: Both webinars will be on Zoom. You'll receive a confirmation from Zoom for each webinar you register to attend, with the information you need to join the webinar. **SAVE THAT EMAIL!**

To register click the date below:

Correctional Staff Confronting COVID-19

30 May 2020

Correctional Families Confronting COVID-19

20 June 2020

Unable to attend? We plan to record the webinars and make the links to them available on desertwaters.com after the events.

*To familiarize yourselves with Zoom participation prior to the webinars, **here's** a short tutorial.*

I Ask How Others Are Doing

By CO Ron Mason

In the end, it will be impossible to know if we overreacted or did too much, but it will be QUITE apparent if we under-reacted or did too little."

Unknown American,

March 14, 2020 in reference to COVID-19 Pandemic.

That quote resonates with me on so many different levels - on the personal level, the family level, daily life level or the institutional level.

The fear of the unknown and how to respond can drive our brains to play out worst case scenarios, attempt to resolve each, and react in the most extreme manner for self-preservation, the preservation of mind and body.

We all do it daily as we walk through the gates. Our mind quickens, our heart rate increases. We run scenarios through our head of what can occur in the day ahead of us. What were the tribulations and politics we left behind the day before on the yard, and what are we returning to today? Through our experience, we have a strong belief that the obstacles before us in the prison setting can be solved and worked out. Each day before

us is a puzzle to be solved with the tools that we have learned and evolved. That is our nature as Type A problem-solvers in life. Give me a problem and I will attack it through mind, word or physical deed. Attack me and I shall fight back, and preserve me and mine. The stress wears upon me and I carry it as a badge of honor. Hit me with some problem that I understand or can solve, I will deliver unto you a workable solution.

Wake up to a pandemic. An enemy that I cannot see, touch or smell. An enemy so foreign that takes lives in silence. I have been knocked off my stool, like a punch to the face with no attacker to be seen.

Now I find myself acting out, lashing out, heaping frustration upon those close to me due to an unknown attacker that reminds me of the weakness of being a human being. My frustration boils over me. I feel regrets for my reactions to the situation I find myself in. The frustrations and unknowns overwhelm me and place me in a strange place after I'd finally come to terms with and I had understood life with PTSD.

I Ask How Others Are Doing cont.

This new enemy is unlike anything we or those of our generation have ever had to face.

Now I have to come to terms with what is ahead. I know that I am scared, frustrated, angry, sad, mad, unsure, and wandering looking for a light.

I awake each day, reminding myself to ask how others are doing, instead of inflicting my angst on them, so

they do not have to carry that extra weight while they carry their own angst. Asking how others are doing reminds me that I am not alone, and reminds others that they are not alone. And most important of all, I remind myself to look for what I can provide - a kind act for all that I meet in the daily journey that we are all traveling.

Be kind to each other!

Disposable?

Anonymous

The attainment of correctional agencies' mission of safety and offender rehabilitation depends on (a) the health and wellness of staff (especially custody employees), and (b) the combined and harmonized efforts of staff of various disciplines and job roles. What the author of the article below emphasizes is critical. If, based on certain actions, one group of corrections employees perceives that they are not valued by administrators as much as corrections employees who belong to another professional group, discord will ensue. And a house divided cannot stand. Perception matters, whether it is accurate or not. That is why every effort must be made to strengthen the ties between administrators and custody employees, and to work diligently to avoid divisions and to heal rifts among staff of various disciplines. C.S.

When I was on an "essential" errand, I ran into a corrections officer whom I had met previously, and I asked him about how he was doing amid the COVID-19 crisis. He informed me that his facility had one confirmed case of an inmate who tested positive, but that this inmate was in a unit on the other side of

Disposable *cont.*

the compound from where he normally worked. We discussed many issues surrounding the crisis, including the political, financial, social, and physical concerns.

When I asked him to clarify what types of positions were considered essential in his agency, I was surprised by his answer. He told me about the doctors, nurses, food service, and maintenance workers who were required to come to work. Then he described the personal protective equipment that each of these groups of employees were issued. He talked about the masks and gloves the medical staff were wearing, and he was sure to tell me that they seemed to have an unlimited supply because they were not reusing them or carefully removing them to sanitize later. The trash bins in the medical area were full of used masks, gowns, and gloves.

Then he told me about the food service and maintenance staff who were issued one medical type mask a day and several sets of gloves. These items had to be re-used throughout the shift, but at the end of the shift they were thrown away, with confidence that a new set would be given to them the next day. These staff were working with inmate crews that had been reduced in size, down to the bare minimum needed, in order to avoid unnecessary exposure.

As we continued to talk, he eventually talked about the officers. When he did, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a face-covering device that he had been issued. He stated that he was given four of these masks, but the first three fell apart in the washing process and he didn't know how to fix them. Therefore, he was down to one covering. This item was referred to as a face mask, but it didn't really look like any of the masks that I had recently seen. The item was merely a rectangle with elastic bands attached to the ends. There was no form to fit around the nose and

Disposable cont.

there was no place for a filter or a vent for breathing. I asked about the unusual material that the item was made from, and my friend told me that it was made from old inmate uniforms. The common opinion was that old inmate-issued pants that had been torn or too damaged to repair, were used for these items. Many inmates taunted the staff who actually wore the face coverings (which were not many). Apparently, inmates told officers that these masks were made from the crotches of their old pants, and now the officers were wearing their crotches across their face.

Well, anyone could tell by looking at the item that they were not made from a crotch, but the reality of the situation was not the issue here. The issue was the perception. Then my friend told me something that haunts me still: "The face covering doesn't matter, because we aren't essential, we are disposable." He continued: "You see, the people at work who were given 'real' stuff to help to protect themselves (doctors, nurses, maintenance and food service workers) were the essential employees. The rest of us (officers) were not really being protected through any type of equipment or change in our duties. The face coverings are not really going to help us get through this, because it doesn't matter if we get through this. We are disposable."

My friend went on to tell me that he didn't know any officer that really felt like they mattered as an individual. He described changes in policy over the last few years that loosened the consequences for inmate misbehavior. He talked about the reduction in segregation beds and the many times that his "word" was not enough to keep an inmate on restricted status. Then, he quoted the President of the United States, who was warning everyone to maintain a 6-foot distance between each person. This 6-foot distance was particularly ironic when you look at the work of corrections officers. If only!! Then, as if he had a memo in front of him, he began to recite a message that he

Disposable *cont.*

had heard at roll call that very day: "It is very important that all staff wear these masks anytime they are within 6 feet of an inmate, because we do not want to spread this disease to an inmate. They (inmates) don't deserve that." The captain had told them that if they wanted to remove the masks when there was only staff around, that was acceptable. The captain added: "By the way, I don't want anyone calling in sick just because they might have been around someone that might be positive for the disease. If you are not on a ventilator, you better be here!" WOW! Again, even if my friend misinterpreted what the memo or the captain had said, it didn't really matter – what mattered was that he believed the message as he relayed it to me.

As I walked away from this encounter, I thought about my friends and former co-workers who were working inside prison facilities all over the country. I wondered how many of them felt disposable. I worried about the politics, the financial state of the country, the relationships that were being strained due to isolation or work pressures, and about the people I know who were ill from this virus. I worried about all of these corrections professionals who are going to work every day to protect the public, their co-workers, and the inmates within their facilities. I worried that this one officer was not the only one who felt disposable.

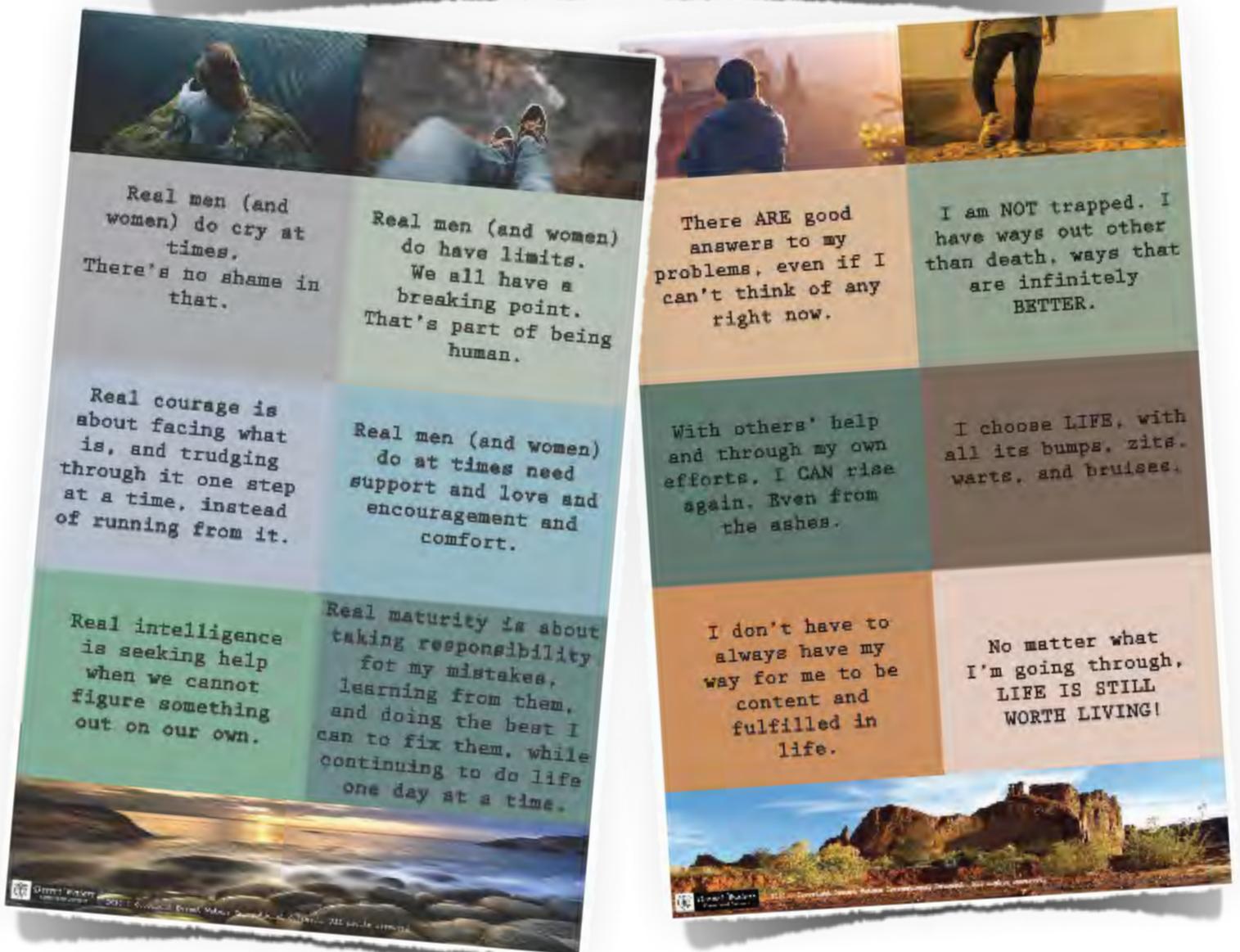
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Stop Corrections Staff Suicide!

Living Brave Posters

The suicide rate of corrections officers has consistently been found to be higher than that of other populations. These posters are designed to affirm choosing life in spite of hardship, and to encourage emotional honesty and shame-free acceptance of vulnerability.



Click **HERE** for more information and to order.

How to Work through Anxiety and Stay the Course

By Haley Walden

Reprinted with permission from [Elegant Themes](#).

Anxiety is disruptive to many facets of everyday life. Whether you're a freelance entrepreneur, an employee, or even a stay-at-home parent, anxiety can all-too-easily derail your daily activities. Knowing how to work through anxiety and stay the course is essential to success in all areas of your business and your life.

According to data from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders affect 18.1% of Americans. But even individuals who haven't been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder experience it from time to time—especially during seasons of uncertainty.

If you struggle to stay focused at work due to anxiety, here are a few easy things you can do to take control and stay the course.

Acknowledge how you're feeling right now

The first step to taking care of anxiety is acknowledging how you feel in the moment. Take a few minutes to observe the sensations in your body and the thoughts you're having. Some people notice a racing heartbeat or tightness in their chest, among other signs and symptoms.

Often, anxiety causes our thoughts to spin out of control. If you can recognize your anxious thought patterns before they take over, it's much easier to switch your logic-brain back on.

Once you've pinpointed what's happening in your mind and your body, you'll be able to take action to start feeling better.

Breathe

When I'm feeling anxious, it's infuriating for someone to tell me to breathe. But, taking a few minutes to focus on breathing almost always helps me to determine how to work through anxiety in that moment. Practicing breathing exercises can calm your body and mind, and help you increase mindfulness when the world feels chaotic.

Work through Anxiety cont.

Give yourself some time to process how you feel

When it comes to how to work through anxiety, sometimes it's helpful to take a few minutes to process your feelings. Consider setting an alarm for five or ten minutes, and set your work aside. Then, let yourself think about your worries until the time is up.

While you're processing, you can ask yourself questions about what you're feeling. What are the facts? Are you relying on logic or emotion to draw conclusions? What are the possible solutions?

Break out the journal

Journaling is an effective method for processing your thoughts and untangling your emotions. During your break, grab your journal (or login if you use a digital one) and free-write about how you're feeling. Web-based journals like [Penzu](#) and [Journey](#) or journaling apps like [Day One](#) and [Daylio](#) are all great digital options.

Your journal is a safe place to brain-dump and overthink. Sometimes, when we see our thoughts on the page, it becomes easier to assess them objectively. In other words, we can literally separate our thoughts from our emotions when we write them out.

Focus on what you know you can control

If you need help determining how to work through anxiety, focus on the things you know you can control. Anxiety arises from feeling wildly out of control of our surroundings. Therefore, it helps to remind yourself which factors in your life you are actually in control of.

Next, focus on those things—and try not to think so much about the things that are out of your hands. Trying to take control of factors that are outside your reach will just exhaust you and make your anxiety worse.

Work through Anxiety cont.

Avoid numbing out...

...at least, not for long! It's easy to numb anxiety using games, social media, and other distractions. While those methods might work in the moment, procrastinating on essential work tasks will undoubtedly make your anxiety worse later. If you do need to give your brain a break for a few minutes, do so (I do!). But set a timer so you get can back to work.

Move your body

Mental health professionals widely recommend exercise as an effective way to manage anxiety. Professionals who want to know how to work through anxiety should consider adding exercise into their daily self-care routine.

There are many options for making exercise a part of your day. Take a walk, roll out your yoga mat, or take a streaming workout class. If you need moral support, ask a friend to partner up with you (even remotely!) for accountability.

Connect with colleagues more often

Connecting with coworkers, colleagues, and mentors can help lift our spirits and brighten our mood. After all, many of us work from home these days—and working from home means we spend a lot of time isolated from others. Anxiety tends to make us want to turn inward, rather than reaching out. But chances are, if you're feeling this way, another entrepreneur you know is feeling the same.

Connect and team up with other professionals in your industry to maintain plenty of human connection and to keep each other accountable. Use videoconferencing software such as Zoom or Google Hangouts to host remote office hours with colleagues—or to just say hi.

Work through Anxiety cont.

Remind yourself this isn't forever

When anxiety hits us full-force, it fools us into believing it will never go away, and that nothing will ever be okay. But anxiety is momentary, and it does pass—especially when you have strategies to help you overcome it quickly. Whatever is happening in the moment, it's powerful to remind yourself that this isn't going to last forever. The panic will ease, your breathing and heart rate will return to normal, and you'll feel like yourself again.

Seek help from a licensed therapist

If anxiety is disrupting your daily activities and simple techniques are not helping you manage it, you may need to get help from a licensed therapist. Your therapist can help you learn to navigate anxiety and panic in productive ways, and they'll give you a safe space to express your feelings.

Sometimes, anxiety must be managed with prescription medication and more specific forms of therapy. Your provider will recommend treatments based on your individual situation.

Wrapping up

Many professionals experience anxiety—so if you're feeling anxious or overwhelmed, especially during a season of uncertainty, you're not alone. Taking excellent care of yourself is the first step to overcoming the emotions you're experiencing right now, so start today.

Needing to vent? Seeking emotional support?

Email us at ventline@desertwaters.com.

[HERE's](#) more information about the Corrections Ventline.

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IN MEMORIAM

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Scott Horman, *Surveillance Officer*

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Antoine Jones, *Correctional Officer*

Kristin Keyer, *Supervising United States Probation Officer*

Florencio Pablo Lopez, *Juvenile Institutions Officer II*

Vanessa Mackey, *Deputy*

Zelzah Martin, *Probation Officer*

Lansing Correctional Facility, KDOC

Corrections Reception Center, ODRC

Eastham Unit, Houston County, TDCJ

San Mateo County Probation Department (CA)

Northern State Prison, New Jersey DOC

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch Court Support Services

Teford Unit, TDCJ

Middleton Unit, TDCJ

LDPSC

Hudson County Jail

Bexar County, TX

South Woods State Prison, NJDOC

Plainfield Correctional Facility, Indiana DOC

Orange County Corrections (FL)

Correctional Reception Center, ODRC

Central Reception/Assignment Facility, NJ DOC

Edgecombe Correctional Facility, NY DOCCS

TDCJ

Brevard County Sheriff's Office, FL

Louisiana State Penitentiary, LDPSC

NYC Department of Probation (NY)

Riker's Island, NYC Department of Corrections

Rikers's Island, NYC Department of Corrections

Maricopa County Adult Probation (AZ)

James T. Vaughn Correctional Center, DEDOC

Cook County Jail, IL

Southern District of Ohio (OH)

Monterey County Probation Department (CA)

New Orleans Sheriff's Office

NYC Department of Probation (NY)



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IN MEMORIAM cont.

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Kyomi McKeithen, *Probation Officer*

Thomas McMahon, *Probation Officer*

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Danny Mendoza, *Corrections Officer*

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Raymond Scholwinski, *Sgt.*

Akbar Shabazz, *Chaplain*

Antoine Stewart, *Correctional Officer*

Terry Vick, *Sheriff's Deputy*

Gary Weinke, *Correctional Officer*

Casadear "Ceda" Williams, *Medical Assistant*

Dennis Zambrana, *Sergeant*

Name not released, *Detention Deputy*

Name not released, *contract employee and counselor*

Name not released, *staff member*

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center, LDPSC

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center, LDPSC

Sonoma County Probation (CA)

NYC Department of Probation (NY)

Marion County Probation (IN)

Wynne Unit, Huntsville, TDCJ

California Rehabilitation Center, CDCR

Richland County Court Services (OH)

Pueblo County Sheriff's Office (CO)

TDCJ

Monroe Correctional Complex, WADOC

Cook County Sheriff's Office (IL)

Durham County Sheriff's Office (NC)

Dauphin County Probation Services (PA)

Pickaway Correctional Institution, ODRC

Cook County Jail, IL

Lansing Correctional Facility, KDOC

Harris County Sheriff's Office, TX

TDCJ

Cook County Jail, IL

Hopkins County, KY

Indiana DOC, Wabash Valley Correctional Facility

Mobile Metro Jail, Mobile County Sheriff's Office

Chester County Prison, Pennsylvania DOC

Shelby County Sheriff's Department

Yavapai County Jail, AZ

SCI-Phoenix, PADO



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Your donations are tax-deductible.



Quote of the Month

"You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose - with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

~ Vice Admiral James Stockdale, POW

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DWCO Mission

To promote the occupational, personal and family well-being of the corrections workforce through the provision of evidence-informed resources, solutions, and support.

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, Inc., is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional 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.

MANY THANKS

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