

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 22

IN THIS ISSUE:

- From The Director's Desk
- Why Administrators Should Celebrate the National Correctional Family Appreciation Week
- Aftershock
- A Family Affair
- From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™ – A Family's Perspective
- The Case for Offering the Correctional Family Wellness Courses Alongside CF2F: A "Wholistic" Approach
- Quote Of The Month
- In Memoriam

A Desert Waters Publication

JUNE 2025



DESERTWATERS.COM



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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

In this issue of the Correctional Oasis, we focus on an often-overlooked but crucial aspect of correctional life: the experiences and needs of the family members of correctional employees. While the spotlight frequently shines on the challenges faced by staff within the walls of correctional facilities or in their community-based offices, the ripple effects of these challenges at home often go unnoticed. The hard truth is that the emotional toll of the job frequently “comes home” with staff, impacting communication, emotional availability, and overall family well-being.

In this edition, we explore the compelling reasons why correctional agencies must take intentional steps to recognize and celebrate the vital role that families play in supporting their loved ones. Initiatives like National Correctional Family Appreciation Week—celebrated this year from the 2nd of June through the 8th of June—provide a meaningful opportunity to honor these unsung heroes. However, true appreciation requires more than just symbolic gestures. We also offer practical strategies for agencies to provide consistent, year-round support and acknowledgment of correctional families. Our aim is to help agencies foster healthier, stronger, and more resilient communities, both on and off the job.

Caterina Spinaris

WHY ADMINISTRATORS SHOULD CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL CORRECTIONAL FAMILY APPRECIATION WEEK

CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

Correctional employees serve on the front lines of public safety, often working under intensely stressful conditions in highly challenging environments. However, **behind most correctional employees are families that share in the burdens of the profession**—quietly making sacrifices that too often go unrecognized. National Correctional Family Appreciation Week—celebrated this year from the 2nd of June through the 8th of June—offers a critical opportunity for administrators to celebrate these families. We all need to acknowledge that **their unwavering and exemplary support plays a vital role in the well-being and even the retention of the correctional workforce.**

The Hidden Sacrifices of Correctional Families

Correctional families make significant sacrifices that enable their loved ones to perform their duties. Mandatory overtime—sometimes multiple times per week—can leave families scrambling to adjust childcare, household responsibilities, and emotional needs without the presence of the correctional employee. These demands include accommodating unpredictable shift schedules, nontraditional weekends, and holidays spent apart.

In the absence of their loved one, correctional families must find ways to maintain household stability, provide emotional support, and uphold family routines. In addition, they often also bear the emotional toll of concerns about the safety of their family member, knowing the inherent risks of working in correctional settings.

Moreover, the cumulative stress of correctional work—commonly referred to as *Corrections Fatigue*—can lead to noticeable changes in employees' personalities, physical health, psychological health, and social functioning. Families must often cope with these shifts, trying to offer understanding and support even as they themselves are impacted.

The emotional weight carried by correctional families can heavily influence an employee's career decisions, specifically whether they choose to promote, stay in the profession, or pursue another path. The perspective and input of family members are often pivotal, and shaped by the cumulative impact of the demanding correctional work schedule and its effects on family life. Families may either encourage their loved one to continue in the profession or, conversely, push for a change if the toll on family life becomes too great.

How Administrators Can Acknowledge and Celebrate Correctional Families

Helping corrections families is not simply something to be addressed haphazardly, as an afterthought, or once a year during a Family Day. Rather, **recognizing and honoring correctional families should be a deliberate and ongoing effort by correctional leadership.** This goal must be pursued rigorously and systematically, starting on graduation day at the Training Academy.

Both employees and their families should be provided with information about the potential toll of the job, along with strategies to manage its impact and maintain the health and safety of their families. This approach is a win-win: it supports both employees and their families, while also benefiting the agencies they work for. After all, unhealthy family dynamics can eventually affect work performance and, over time, even employee retention.

Here are several meaningful ways to support correctional families:

- **Host Appreciation Events:** Organize family-inclusive gatherings during the National Correctional Family Appreciation Week—celebrated this year from the 2nd of June through the 8th of June—to show your appreciation to them. These can include barbecues or family-friendly open house tours of the facility or office where their loved one works.
- **Foster Community Through Family Events:** Follow this up by organizing informal gatherings such as park days, picnics, or single-day retreats one to three times per year to help correctional families build connections, share experiences, and create a sense of community and support beyond the workplace.
- **Create Family Support Resources:** Offer workshops, support groups, and informational materials tailored to the unique needs of correctional families, including stress management and navigating shift work.
- **Involve Families in Wellness Initiatives:** Recognize families as stakeholders and partners in employee well-being by inviting their input and participation in staff wellness and mental health programs.
- **Public Acknowledgment:** Use newsletters, social media, and internal communications to publicly thank families for their support, acknowledging the burdens put on them by the excessive use of mandatory overtime, and sharing stories that highlight their sacrifices and resilience.

Conclusion

National Correctional Family Appreciation Week must be more than a symbolic gesture if it's to truly resonate with correctional staff and their families. It should mark the beginning of sustained, meaningful action by leadership to recognize and uplift the vital role families play in the corrections profession. These families endure long hours, high stress, and emotional strain alongside their loved ones working in correctional settings. By **acknowledging their sacrifices, seeking their input, listening to their voices, and investing in their well-being in tangible ways**, administrators do more than express gratitude—they **take a critical step toward strengthening workforce morale, and possibly even retention and the overall health of the correctional system.**

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE
**NATIONAL CORRECTIONAL
FAMILY APPRECIATION WEEK**

Get on Board!

As an agency, EXPRESS YOUR APPRECIATION
to the families of your employees!

As individuals, THANK your family members!
They are carrying a very heavy load.

June 2-8, 2025



Click or scan the code to show your support!

admin@desertwaters.com

desertwaters.com/familyweek

[#nationalcorrectionalfamilyappreciationweek](https://twitter.com/nationalcorrectionalfamilyappreciationweek)

AFTERSHOCK

BY CO RON MASON (RETIRED)

noun

af·ter·shock | \ - ,shäk

Definition of aftershock

- 1:** an aftereffect of a distressing or traumatic event
- 2:** a minor shock following the main shock of an earthquake

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

It is what you feel after a life altering event. It is when you go to work and expect to return home after your shift to resume YOUR life. Then a horrific event occurs on shift, and now your life has been altered forever. You were a witness, no, a participant in an event you had no real control over. You never wanted to see that. You knew it could happen, but you could never truly prepare yourself for it. You are a little bit dazed. A little bit disoriented. A little bit out of sorts.

Write the report and submit it. Get programs back to normal. Finish the shift and get back to NORMAL life. Set your emotions and thoughts aside; you are going back to YOUR life.

My mind keeps racing back to what occurred. What if I did this or that, or did something else? Would the outcome have been the same? Why do I feel so cold? Why do I have so many questions in my head? Home at last. My sanctuary. I am quiet. "My day was fine. Can I get a few minutes to relax? I will be out in a minute." I am tired. The adrenaline crash is hitting me. But I am home. That other world is far away. I AM tired. A nap would be nice. Nope, it's time for family time.

Dinner time. We all sit down for dinner. I am grateful for my family and all being together. This is why I wake up and go to work every day. The kids are talking about their day at school and their time with friends. I begin to zone out to supervising chow at work. Oh yeah, I try to focus on what my family is talking about. But I am not a great participant in the conversation; I wish I was. "How was everyone's day?" I ask. I will keep mine to myself.

Bedtime. The time I dread, the time I know I will have to relive my fitful fears over and over in my constantly fitful sleep. I tuck my children in and wish them a good night and kiss their forehead. Goodnight, my love. Daddy loves you. Sleep well and have sweet dreams.

I can't remember the last time I didn't wake up in a heavy sweat and trying to forget my nightmares. Sometimes they scare me. The truth is, they always scare me.

It is dark. The twitches, the kicks, the shrugs, the mumblings, the flailing, the sweating, the swearing, the punching, the wandering about the room.

I am asleep. I know not that these things occur, I have no memories of these events. I wake up for another day of work. I am kind of rested, but a little tired. "You look a little tired."

I wake up for work; time to do it again.

What will I see today?

"My sleep, I try to rest. Your restlessness prevents my sleep. I worry. Are you okay? You're making weird grunting sounds and grinding your teeth in your sleep. You wake me up. What are you saying? Why? Not again. I want you to rest, but your rest never comes. My love, I want you to rest, I want to rest, yet I worry. What happened to you to cause this restlessness? I want to know. I want to be there for you. What are you not telling me? What is happening to you? I am scared. But, I love you and I care. I am here for you, but I am growing tired with each night."

How do we find rest?

A FAMILY AFFAIR

© CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

Dear Corrections Employee:

The wife of a corrections officer once told me, “When my husband got a job at the Department of Corrections as a Corrections Officer, I had no idea that it was a package deal—that we’d be signing up too, as a family.”

Since then, I’ve heard similar statements expressed by other family members of corrections staff as they navigate through the uncharted waters of their loved one working in corrections, and while trying to understand and adapt to changes in their life as a family.

More often than not, your spouse and your other family members enter into the world of corrections uninformed and unprepared for the toll this occupation can take on you, and by extension on them, and the changes they will be experiencing in their home life as a result of your job demands.

Your family members are happy that you will have a steady paycheck with benefits. They are thrilled to hear that your paycheck could be augmented through the pay differential of shift work, through working on holidays, and through working overtime. But they do not yet know how these work conditions translate in real life, and how they can affect your family life and your well-being.

Your family members usually do not know or understand:

- That, when you enter the corrections workforce, they too will enter a world with its own language and its own rules, a world which operates on basic assumptions that are vastly different from those of the free world
- That in the corrections world things happen that are so far out of the ordinary, that if they were told to people on the street, many would just refuse to believe that they really happen
- That your family’s established rhythms, traditions, and practices will be affected by the nature and demands of corrections work, and what may be needed to cope with that
- The lifestyle changes that shift work, overtime, and changing schedules bring, and they are not mentally and practically prepared for the sacrifices that these changes require
- That the corrections mindset will come home with you, and that as a result, in addition to acquiring desirable new skills, you might also be shaped negatively by the job, and become someone quite unlike who you used to be prior to starting your corrections career
- Your department’s policies and procedures, your administrative regulations, your work circumstances and details, the work jargon you use
- What it is like to work all night and try to sleep during the day

- The power dynamics of the paramilitary rank structure that is now your workplace
- Why you are chronically exhausted—both physically and emotionally
- Why you no longer have the motivation to engage with your family like you used to do
- Why your ability to emotionally connect with your family is becoming weaker over time, leading to emotional distance or even a feeling of becoming strangers to each other
- Why you are becoming more impatient, irritable, or prone to anger outbursts for no apparent reason
- Why you have developed insensitive “gallows” humor that may be appalling to them, rendering you not very likeable, and perhaps even repulsive to them
- Why your use of profanity has sky-rocketed, often regardless of who is present
- Why you talk to strangers curtly, perhaps even in hostile ways, indicating that you are assuming the worst about them
- Why you are becoming more calloused, less compassionate, or more merciless towards others
- Why you sometimes talk down to your family in demeaning, insulting, and hurtful ways
- Why you order your family members around, trying to control their every move, sometimes even using the very same language with them that you would at work with individuals you manage
- Why you are becoming increasingly stricter with your children, overly worried about their safety, laying down rigid rules, and even running background checks on their friends and their parents
- Why you object to your family members going to certain places or associating with certain people
- Why you turn down invitations to family gatherings, school events, or other social activities, so your family members may end up not going either or going alone —and being resentful about it
- Why you are starting to show signs of serious anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress
- Why you have increased your food, alcohol, and/or tobacco consumption, or why you now engage in other compulsive and escapist behaviors, such as excessive playing of video games, gambling, or online sexual activities
- Why you are steadily gaining weight
- Why your physical health is taking a turn for the worse, with your blood pressure and blood sugar readings no longer falling in the normal range
- Why you cannot get through a sleep cycle without thrashing, yelling, kicking, or punching in your sleep

My clinical and training experience with corrections families is that if these issues are left unaddressed, they will eventually hurt marriages and parent-child relationships.

Families cannot continue with life as usual after one of them hires on in corrections. Proactive measures, preparation, and new learning are needed to protect your most valuable earthly investment—your family.



FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILLMENT™

Online Instructor Training

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

October 21-24 & 27-29, 2025

Seven 4.5-hr days

[MORE INFORMATION](#)



Click or scan the code to register.



FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILLMENT™ – A FAMILY’S PERSPECTIVE

The following narratives were written by the wife and teenage daughter of a correctional staff member.

The Wife’s Perspective

How does someone with 20+ years of working in corrections cope with stress and the everyday concern for their personal safety, as well as their co-workers’? They become a different person or develop an alter ego, if you will. This allows them to keep a stern profile and not allow people to see any other side of them. For safety and security issues this is more than acceptable. However, one needs to be able to turn that off when they leave work and go home to their family and friends.

Although I’ve never worked directly with offenders, because my husband deals with it on a daily basis, I feel as though I have lived the experiences, situations, etc., that he has. He has always been a wonderful provider, soulmate, father, and friend but recently I had noticed, those things were slowly diminishing and he was becoming someone that I did not feel as though I knew anymore. The stress of the job was getting to him and that stern profile he had to maintain eight hours a day while at work became his profile every hour of every day.

Our daughter had even noticed the change in her father. Up to that point they had always had an inseparable bond. This was breaking our daughter’s heart, and after a recent disagreement they had, she lashed out at me saying some very hurtful things about her father. I knew in my heart she truly did not mean them but was so angry she had just come to her boiling point and had exploded. I asked her to give herself a few days to calm down and then discuss it with her father. A few days went by and she did what I asked. I did not witness the conversation but I came in towards the end of it, and I could see the pain and hurt in my husband’s eyes. He had no idea things had gotten this bad.

We, as a family, discussed other issues that needed addressed. I felt that we had made progress but I did not have any idea how much until my husband went to the CF2F class. I remember him coming home from the class and immediately hugging our daughter and apologizing for his behavior and who he had become. I saw an immediate change in him after this class and his passion for this program. The man I married 25 years ago has become the same man I fell in love with all over again!

This isn’t something to be ignored. Corrections is a very stressful job and your family and friends are the ones who suffer from it. Don’t shut them out, they are the ones who love and support you every day.

The Daughter's Perspective

My father has always been my biggest role model. Every morning, he set me up for success. Words of encouragement were spoken, he told me I would do amazing things, said that he loved me, and out the door to work he went. The mornings, they made me happy.

It was always the afternoon I dreaded, when dad came home from work. Dad would come home defeated every day, answering constant phone calls, and just looked like he had given up. My cheery, loving father seemed to vanish when he was off work.

People started telling me things about my dad, like how power-needy he was, how he had to be in constant control, how his emotions always affected his attitude. I began to realize that my dad was becoming his work.

I struggled with connecting with him, never feeling like I could disclose information to him, and instead feeling scared to tell my dad about my life in fear of him disapproving, or snapping at me. My mom and I brought this to his attention, and that's when things began to change. My father was so hurt—he had not realized what was happening.

Next thing I knew, Dad was gone for a week, attending the CF2F instructor training. I remember the day he came home. He came in the door and hugged me, and started giving Mom and me a summary of his week. Then Dad broke down, and started sobbing. He told us all about these things that he learned, the stories he was told, and how he didn't feel like he was alone in his struggle of becoming his work.

I broke down right along with him. From the moment he stepped into the door, I knew my dad was back. He was given the right tools to understand and cope with what he was going through, and he used them. Now Dad channels his rough patches into productivity, and I have never been so proud of him. Dad and I have never had such a strong relationship, and once again, I look to model myself after the person my father has become.



INSTRUCTOR TRAINING



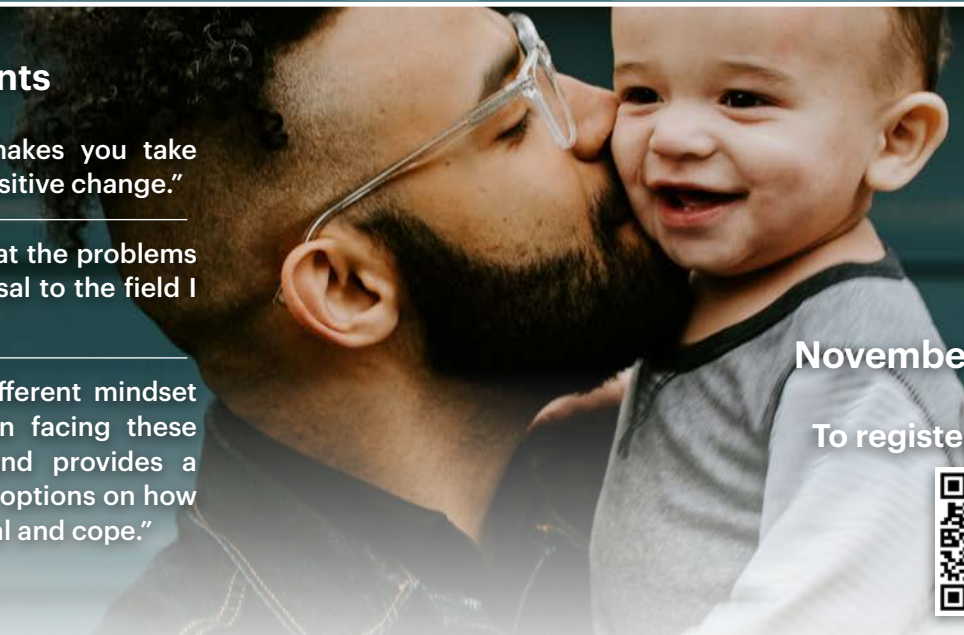
SEND YOUR VETTED STAFF TO GET CERTIFIED TO TEACH THESE COURSES TO COWORKERS AND ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS!

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 12-14 & 17-19

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



THE CASE FOR OFFERING THE CORRECTIONAL FAMILY WELLNESS COURSES ALONGSIDE CF2F: A “WHOLISTIC” APPROACH*

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

Desert Waters’ two *Correctional Family Wellness™* (CFW) courses—one course for correctional staff (CFW-S) and the other for their adult family members (CFW-F)—are designed to be offered either after completion of the *From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™* (CF2F) course (which is offered to staff only) or independently. However, offering CF2F to staff first provides significant benefits.

CF2F is a foundational course that helps staff understand the nature and consequences of *Corrections Fatigue*—why it occurs and how it impacts their identity, worldview, spirituality, health, and overall functioning. It introduces strategies to enhance professional fulfillment, both individually and as a team, while also promoting better self-care. By fostering self-awareness and initiating resilience-building, CF2F prepares staff to more effectively manage themselves and their relationships at work and at home.

Through CF2F, staff gain critical insight into the unique challenges of correctional work and its psychological and relational consequences. This self-awareness is essential before addressing more deeply how those experiences affect family life. Once staff can recognize and begin to manage their own Fatigue, they are better equipped to understand and support their loved ones—and to engage in meaningful conversations about shared challenges and how to navigate them.

The two *Correctional Family Wellness™* courses build on this foundation by focusing specifically on family dynamics, and going beyond acknowledging the hardships correctional families face. When both staff and family members participate in CFW-S and CFW-F, they can develop a shared framework for communication, deepen empathy for each another, and strengthen emotional bonds. These courses help support not just individual well-being, but also the health and resilience of the correctional family unit as a whole by offering concrete tools to rebuild trust and maintain connection.

More specifically, CFW-S helps staff reduce the negative impact of correctional work on family rhythms. It explores how work-related changes in their lives and in their person can influence their behavior at home and offers tools to minimize those ripple effects.

CFW-F, in turn, helps family members understand how and why their loved one has changed since entering the profession. It provides practical strategies for supporting the staff member, protecting and fostering their emotional connection with them, while also caring for their own well-being.

In short, CF2F establishes a foundation for staff to become more self-aware of the job's impact and their personal reactions to it, while offering practical strategies to enhance both their professional and personal

lives. The *Correctional Family Wellness™* courses expand that foundation into the home, promoting relational wellness—because correctional staff health doesn’t end at the facility gate or at the probation or parole office in the community. It continues at home, where the strength of the family unit plays a vital role in the long-term well-being of those who serve.

*We use the spelling *wholistic*—with a “w”—in this article’s title to emphasize the *whole* person: the staff member AND their family system. This highlights the vital connection between individual wellness and the social and relational systems they’re part of—on and off the job. While *holistic* and *wholistic* are often used interchangeably, the added “w” signals our focus on supporting staff well-being in the full context of their personal and professional lives.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Healing happens when you feel seen, known, and loved—even in your most vulnerable state. Sometimes healing begins with a single question: How are you really feeling?”

Rebekah Lyons and Gabe Lyons

IN MEMORIAM

Mark Danner

Housing Unit Manager
Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

Brandon Sikes

Deputy
Columbia County Sheriff's Office
Georgia
Line of duty death

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

Improving the wellbeing of corrections and other public safety professionals through training, consulting, and other essential resources to foster resilience, mental health, and overall wellness in these challenging professions

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.

