

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

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DESERTWATERS.COM

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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Greetings,

In this issue, we revisit the importance of establishing a **National Correctional Family Appreciation Week**, to be observed this year from June 1-7, 2026, while also exploring related staff and family wellness issues affecting the correctional profession.

We also address the often-overlooked topic of family violence and highlight the importance of culturally informed, correctional-savvy mental health providers who understand the unique realities faced by correctional and other public safety personnel and their families.

Supporting families is not only the right thing to do—it is also a powerful way to strengthen the health, resilience, and effectiveness of those who serve.

Caterina Spinaris

3rd National Correctional Family Appreciation Week June 1–7, 2026

Correctional professionals do not serve alone. Behind most staff members are families that also experience the stress, sacrifices, and demands of correctional work. In 2024, Desert Waters proposed establishing a **National Correctional Family Appreciation Week** during the first week of June, designed to parallel and complement Correctional Officer and Employee Appreciation Week in May.

This week provides administrators with an important opportunity to intentionally recognize, support, and honor the families of correctional professionals—families whose strength, sacrifice, and encouragement often play a critical role in sustaining employee wellness, resilience, morale, and retention.



NATIONAL CORRECTIONAL FAMILY *Appreciation Week*

Consider the following reminders and action steps:

RECOGNIZE & HONOR

Recognize and honor the families who stand behind correctional professionals by **intentionally acknowledging** their sacrifices, support, and contributions to the profession.

REMEMBER

Remember that correctional work does not end at the facility doors by **encouraging conversations, policies, and practices** that recognize the impact of the profession on the entire family.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge the challenges correctional families face by **providing support, flexibility, and resources** that help them navigate shift work, overtime, missed holidays, safety concerns, and the emotional demands of the profession.

STRENGTHEN

Strengthen employee wellness and retention by **promoting family support** as an essential component of resilience, morale, and long-term success in corrections.

HONOR

Honor the quiet strength and unwavering support of correctional families through **intentional appreciation efforts and opportunities for inclusion and connection**.

AFFIRM

Affirm that the sacrifices and contributions of correctional families matter by **ensuring they are recognized** as an important part of the correctional profession.

REFLECT

Use this week as an opportunity to **reflect on and recognize the broader circle of service**—the families who support and sustain those who serve in corrections.

IDENTIFY & IMPLEMENT

Identify and implement meaningful ways to **support and honor** correctional families through appreciation messages, family-centered events, wellness initiatives, educational resources, and public recognition efforts.

PROMOTE

Promote a culture in which **family wellness is prioritized as a vital part of staff wellness, organizational health, and workforce sustainability**.

In corrections, we often say that work goes home. Equally true—but far less acknowledged—is that **home goes to work** and affects job performance, wellness, and resilience, for better or for worse. In fact, retention may at times hinge on family support of this career choice—or the lack of it.

Recognizing family members and expressing gratitude for their support is the least agencies can do.

When families are acknowledged, informed, and valued, they are often better equipped to sustain and support their loved one through the unique pressures of correctional work.

Establishing a National Correctional Family Appreciation Week would send a powerful message that correctional families matter too.

Check out our two [Correctional Family Wellness](#) courses—one designed for adult family members and one for correctional staff.

“But Why Is There Not Anything to Help the Spouses?”

Published anonymously with the authors permission

Dear Desert Waters,

I want to thank you very much for your fine publication. I work in the [REDACTED] Department of Corrections as an Officer. I have been employed by the Department for over 25 years now and have had a pretty good career. I have been involved in many extra duties related to my job over the years, one of which currently is with our Critical Incident Response Team which assists staff after Critical Incidents.

I have personally been exposed to the typical things you would expect in this type of career and career length. I have ridden the ups and I have ridden the downs of this career choice. It has been a good career for me, and has provided for my wife and me, and for our two sons, who are now grown and out of the house. But there has been a cost. That is why I really get a lot out of your publication. I print it off from our computer at work and read it at home. I even share parts of it with my wife, like I did last night.

In our Department, we have things/teams/people to help us deal with the trauma from the job. But as my wife and I were having a discussion the other day, she looked at me and said, “But why is there not anything to help the spouses?” I was speechless. The reality is, no, there is not anything for spouses. And my wife of almost 36 years wanted to know why there wasn’t something to help the families of Officers deal with the effects of the job on their loved ones.

Make no mistake about it, the job has been tough on me. But I work with people in the business, and we do talk. But as my wife told me, there is absolutely no one that she can talk to. Not her sister, not her parents, not her best friend, and not the Pastor of our church. She has plenty of friends, but not one of their spouses is in law enforcement. As she told me, there is no one that understands what and how she feels. No one. She rarely talks to me about how my career has impacted her, but I know that she suffers, mostly in silence. After all these years it finally sank in how much she is bothered by this.

And so, I told her after our last discussion that I would write you and ask you if there are any resources (books, videos, etc.) for loved ones of Corrections Staff that can help them with the effects of this career. Thank you very much for any assistance that you can provide.



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING

NATIONAL CORRECTIONAL FAMILY

Appreciation Week

June 1-7, 2026

When we support families, we strengthen those who serve.



RECOGNIZE

Recognize the families who stand behind correctional professionals.

REMEMBER

Remember that correctional work does not end at the facility doors.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge that these families serve as the foundation that allows staff to continue their critical work.

HONOR

Honor the reality that their sacrifices are real and their contributions matter.

CONSIDER

Consider ways to honor correctional families within your agency and community.

SUPPORT

When we support families, we strengthen those who serve.

When Even the Therapist Doesn't Get It

By Stephanie Rawlings, MSc

When I was a staff wellness program administrator for a large state corrections agency, I spent years standing in front of hundreds of staff encouraging them to make time for therapy or counseling—even if they didn't think they needed it. “Use it as a vaccine against corrections fatigue,” I'd tell them. Predictably, the eye rolls followed. Comments about how EAP was useless weren't far behind. I expected it. I chalked it up to our culture of toughness: We don't need help. We don't do feelings. We definitely don't do psychobabble.

But then came the year when that message—the one I preached so confidently—was put to the test.

It was a year of relentless critical incidents. A year of reading gruesome reports, each accompanied by photos that seared themselves into my memory.

A year marked by multiple staff suicides and near misses I was directly involved in. A year when my team and I carried the emotional residue of every incident in every one of our thirty facilities—not just the ones in our assigned posts. A year when home offered no relief: both of my young children were diagnosed with acute special needs requiring lifelong care.

By the end of that year, I knew I was running on fumes. I knew the signs—I had taught the signs. I needed to practice what I had been preaching and find a therapist.

So I did.

I found someone close to home, and I arranged for sessions for the whole family. My first session with her was the typical “get to know you” meeting. **And then the dam broke.**

I dumped.

Forty uninterrupted minutes of raw download.

I talked about the work—the trauma, the photos, the staff suicides—the ones we tried to help but couldn't save, the ones we never saw coming. I talked about worrying how much more my team could take while knowing every detail of every incident, agency-wide. I talked about the politics, the lack of resources, the families at home who didn't understand this strange, consuming world of corrections—including my own. I talked about the loneliness of not being able to socially engage with people outside the field.

All. Of. It.

Then I shifted to home: marriage, motherhood, the weight of two kids with significant needs—kids she had already met in their own sessions. There was a lot there to unpack, as you can imagine.

And then I finally looked up.

She had tears in her eyes.

She was clearly shocked—speechless, even.

Her first question was, “Why would they do that to you?”

And in that moment, I felt bad for her.

She wasn't ready for what I had shared. She didn't understand that this wasn't something done to me—this was the job. The everyday reality of the profession I served.

I went back two more times—“guilt appointments”—because I wanted to finish my three free sessions. I didn't want to hurt her feelings or make her feel inadequate for not understanding. Her inability to comprehend wasn't her fault...but it also wasn't what I needed.

Later, I learned that what I experienced is common. Widespread, in fact.

And that should concern us.

Correctional professionals may need competent clinicians more than almost any other workforce. If the statistics can be trusted, we are in crisis. Even if the stats aren't perfect, the lived experiences of the people in this field paint a clear picture: we need help.

But the help has to come from people who understand the culture, the conditions, and the emotional landscape of corrections. Without that cultural competence, clinicians can unintentionally alienate the very people they're trying to help.

Corrections staff need help understanding corrections fatigue—and so do the clinicians who serve them.

If we want therapy to be a real option—not an eye-roll-inducing suggestion—then we must equip clinicians with what they need to meet this population where they are. It starts with:

- 1. Courses of study focused on the culture and working conditions of corrections*
- 2. Education on the nature of correctional work and the exposures it brings*
- 3. Training on staff perceptions of mental health and help-seeking*
- 4. Clinicians who are mission-minded and motivated to serve this unique workforce*
- 5. Agencies marketing the need directly to clinicians and sharing training-completion lists with staff*
- 6. Meaningful connections between providers and EAP programs*
- 7. Using contract dollars to pay for competency training*

Corrections professionals are expected to show up for everyone else.

It's time we make sure that, when they finally reach out for help, the people on the other side of the table understand what they're carrying—and how to help lighten the load.

TRAINING FOR CORRECTIONAL LEADERS

FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS



CF2F

From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™

INSTRUCTOR-LED DELIVERY OPTIONS

- 10-HOUR LIVE INSTRUCTION



**STRONG LEADERS.
STRONGER TEAMS.**

Course Overview

This course explores how correctional job stress affects not only frontline staff, but also supervisors and administrators. Participants learn practical strategies to reduce Corrections Fatigue in themselves and strengthen resilience across their teams and workforce.

Length: 10 hours

- ✓ **Data-driven explanation** of the psychological negativity of the corrections workplace, including the impact on staff and organizational outcomes
- ✓ **Data-driven strategies** to increase staff well-being and performance and strengthen organizational culture
- ✓ Based on research in psychological **trauma, resilience, and Positive Psychology**



Session 1: June 24–25, 2026

Or

Session 2: June 23 & June 30, 2026

(both sessions are identical)



10:00 AM – 3:00 PM (ET)



Live Virtual Delivery

This data-driven training is designed to help leaders understand and continually reverse the cumulative impact of workplace burnout and trauma—Corrections Fatigue.



WHAT SETS THIS APART

Applied science + real-world corrections experience.

- ✓ Practical, evidence-based strategies you can use immediately
- ✓ Built specifically for corrections environments



DESIGNED FOR LEADERS ACROSS

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- Probation & Parole
- Juvenile Justice Systems



WHY IT MATTERS

Leadership starts with you. Your health and well-being directly shape your effectiveness, decision-making, and longevity in the field.

When leaders are well, they are better equipped to support staff, strengthen culture, and drive safer, more effective organizations.



INVESTMENT

\$400
per participant

Minimum class size: 8



Secure your spot:
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TO REGISTER:

Please email admin@desertwaters.com

“Daddy Got Distracted:” When the Shift Never Ends

By Ron Mason, Correctional Officer (Retired)

On a daily basis Correctional Officers walk into prison, willingly, to walk amongst killers, rapists, pedophiles, abusers—the members of society you would never want to be near your grandmother. They do their job well and protect you from that world, but it takes a toll. It has a cost. These Officers expose themselves to the worst that humans have to offer and never have a second thought that this happens. They see things they would never want others to have to see, but they know they are providing for their family and believe they are doing a small part at keeping their family and neighbors safe even if it is a cost to their own well-being.

After their shift is finished and they return home to their family, they must first shed the stink of where they have been, hide the hurt that they endured in their work day, and provide a smile. Pretend that they weren't just in a cesspool, and be nice and clean for family time. Family time, helping the kids with homework, I sometimes get distracted. “If I could have responded to that violent incident at work a better way, a little safer

oh yeah, we are working on multiplication tables, sorry honey, Daddy got distracted for a minute.”

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. 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. I am not a great participant in the conversation, I wish I was.

Bedtime. The time I fear, 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, 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. They always scare me. I wake up for work. Time to do it again.

What will I see today?

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“If you build it, more will stay.”

Family Under Siege

@ Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC

Have you ever had the gut-level sense that someone behind you is studying you? (And, no, I'm not saying you may be paranoid!) I had that experience the other day at the grocery store. Instinctively I turned around to see who was looking at me and "caught" a woman in her forties watching me intently. I half-smiled and pushed my cart down the next aisle wondering what might be on her mind.

Suddenly she was right next to me again. "Are you the one who cares about corrections officers?" she asked sheepishly. "You know, Desert...?" I lit up. "Yes, I am." She went on. "I recognized you from a photo in an old newsletter that a friend gave me." "Are you in corrections?" I asked. "No, I'm not, but my husband is. He's been at it nine years now." She hesitated for a brief second, her eyes filling with tears.

Seeing that, I motioned her to follow me to a quiet area of the store. After regaining her composure, she almost whispered, "What you've been writing about is SO true. SO very true. We've been through SO much." She stopped, took a deep breath and threw open the floodgates. "It's much better now. But just three years ago I wasn't sure we were going to make it." "I'm SO glad things are better now," I replied. "And I feel for you, for all you've been through." Then I asked, "Where does your husband work?"

She gave me the name of a facility where I had heard that in the past weekly gang fights were a common occurrence. (I remembered a correctional staff member telling me that working in that type of environment for over 3 years could change a person to the core—and not for the better.) I felt my heart ache for this couple. "Corrections," I thought to myself. "We need the prisons, yet what a toll they take on staff and families alike." I repeated, "I'm glad things are better now at home."

She smiled and nodded. I could tell that she was weighing whether to open up more or not. Then she took the plunge. “My husband became so different after a few years on the job. He’d fly off the handle over ridiculous things. Didn’t want to be around people. His goal became getting on the graveyard shift. Quit doing things as a family. I felt like a widow.” She paused again as if impacted by her own words. I found myself almost holding my breath. The moment felt sacred. One human being making true heart-to-heart contact with another without even exchanging names.

The woman looked me in the eye ever so seriously. “My husband is a good man. We’ve known each other for 20 years, married for 16. I didn’t know what to make of it when his temper started getting out of control. He’d yell over nothing. He’d throw things across the room. A few years back, during a heated argument, he even made a fist and shook it in my face, like he was threatening to hit me. Just because he wanted me to back down. I just couldn’t believe it. It broke my heart. Up to that point he had never done anything like that.” Her tears were flowing now. And my eyes were misty too. “And the kids were terrified. They heard it all from the next room. He felt so bad afterwards. He apologized. But after that, we’d all walk on eggshells around him. No noise, no requests, no complaints. Did not want to set him off, if we could help it. After a while I knew I couldn’t go on living like that. I told him we had to get help or we were history. He kept refusing until the day he put a hole in the wall with his fist. A week later we started marriage counseling.”

She smiled and I smiled back. “Thank you for trusting me and sharing with me,” I said. “And I’m so glad you took action and that he agreed.” “You know, I finally realized that I had to do something for our family,” she replied. “I refused to go on living in fear and worry. And it’s been better. We talk more. There are things that still need work—the occasional yelling. Sometimes he still talks to the kids like a drill sergeant, expecting instant and perfect obedience. I think that when he’s stressed he treats them like inmates. But on the whole, it’s so much better. We’re growing closer one day at a time.” We both sighed a sigh of relief.

“The kids will need help next,” she added wistfully as if talking to herself. “They’re still scared of their dad and mad at him, too. The other day I sat them down and told them that daddy’s work is dangerous and that makes him be all revved up when he gets home.” “You’re doing a wonderful job, “ I said, truly admiring her guts and her resourcefulness. “Last week I caught my son treating his sister just like his dad used to treat me. I got on him right away. Told him that disrespect was not going to be tolerated in our home. I made him apologize to her. It felt good.”

We both smiled again. “Yay for mom!” I cheered. She changed tone. “Thank you for listening. Thank you for caring.” “You’re very welcome,” I answered. “Meeting you made my day. Would you like to be on our email list? You can sign up for our monthly publication, the [Correctional Oasis](#), on our site, at desertwaters.com. There is material there that may be helpful for you to read. And you might be able to share some with your husband too.” She nodded. I will do that. “Keep praying for us in corrections!” she said as we parted ways to continue our shopping.

Afterward I kept thinking about our call to come alongside corrections folks and share the burden with them. What a privilege it is to have the opportunity of such encounters—whether groups in training or one person at a time. And I also thought of you all who make it possible through your caring for corrections staff and through your giving. Thank you.

And if you have suffered intimate partner violence, please get help for yourself. Resources for victims of violence are many, both in local communities and nationally. Here’s a start: [American Psychological Association | Intimate partner violence](#) and [Office on Women's Health | Domestic or intimate partner violence](#). You can also call the National **Domestic Violence Hotline** at 800-799-7233 or TTY 800-787-3224.

And in case you’ve crossed the line, and became physically violent with a loved one, PLEASE get specialized professional help right away. Your most important support system is at risk.

MUCH is at stake.

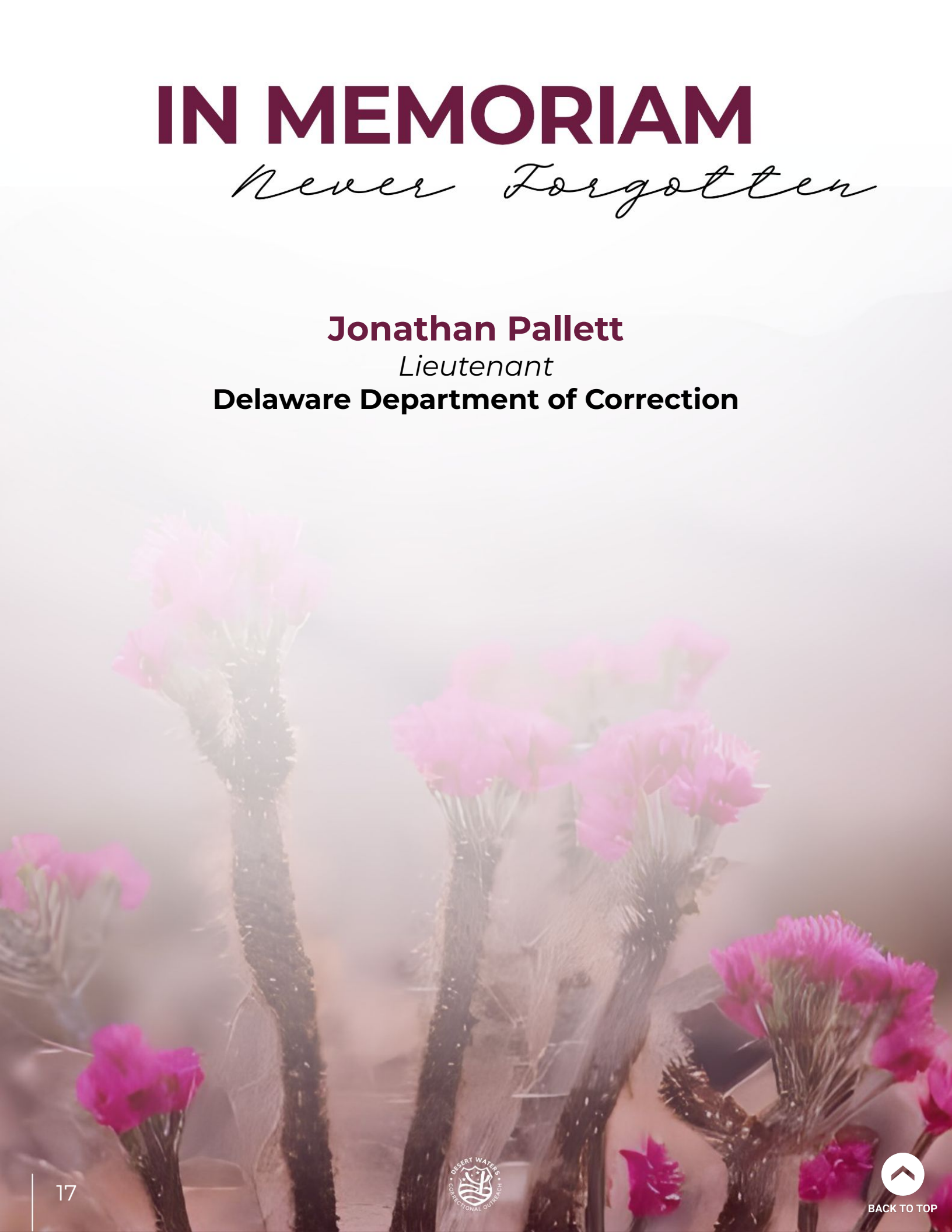
IN MEMORIAM

Never Forgotten

Jonathan Pallett

Lieutenant

Delaware Department of Correction



Quotes

OF THE MONTH

“

“No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another.”

Joseph Addison

*“What can you do to promote world peace?
Go home and love your family.”*

Mother Teresa

“There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues are created, strengthened, and maintained.”

Winston Churchill

”



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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.

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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.

Use of AI Tools

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