

18
YEARS

HELPING CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES BECOME WORKPLACES OF CHOICE!

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A Desert Waters Publication

SEPTEMBER ISSUE

We Have A New Look!

“What Happened To My
Husband?”

A Family Affair

Family Time

In Memoriam

Quote Of The Month

Many Thanks

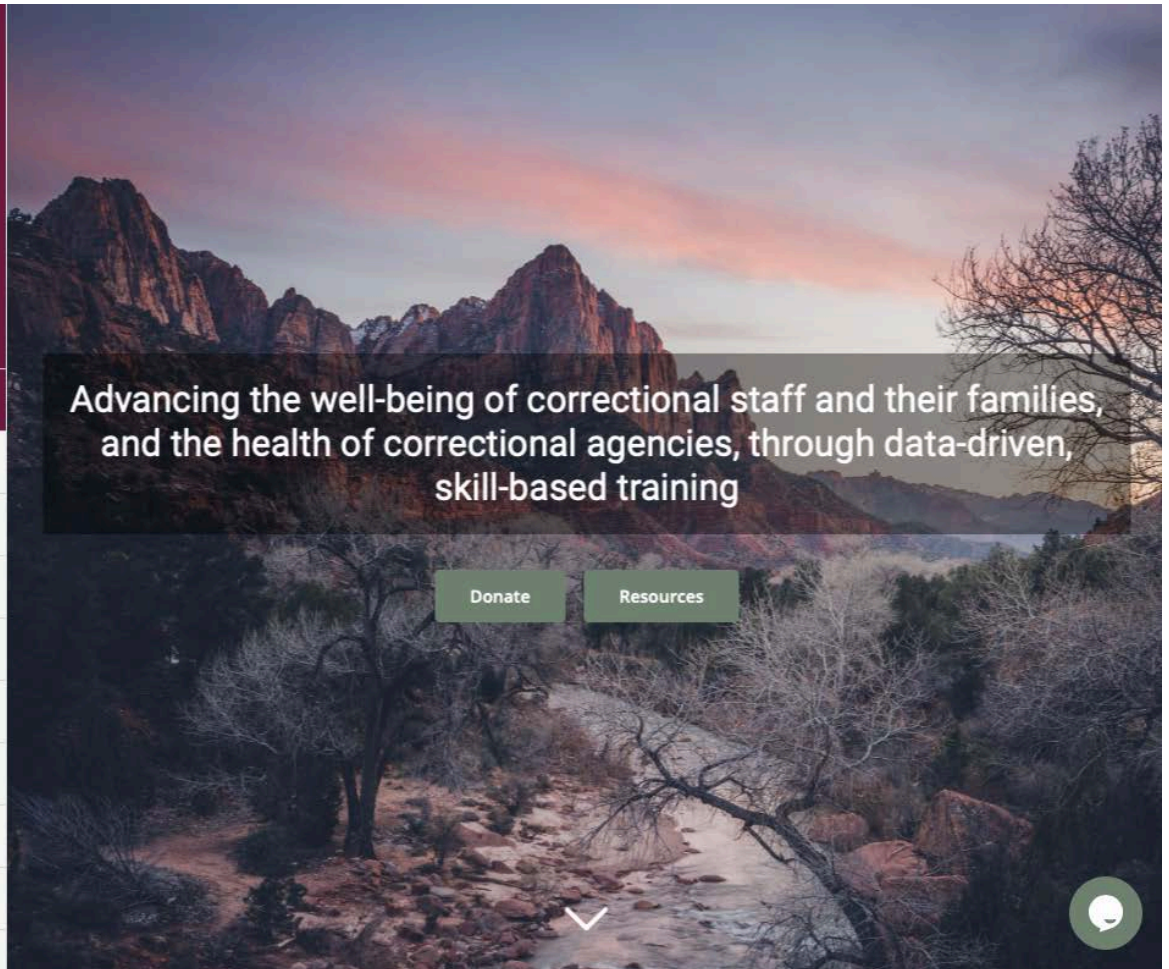
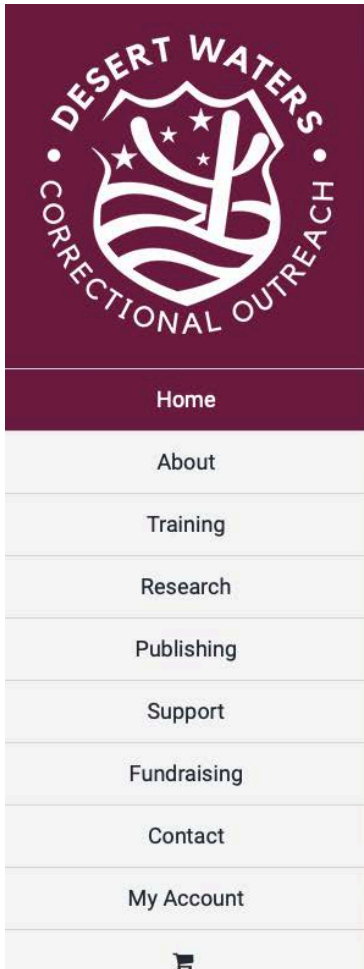


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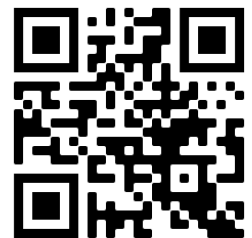


A non-profit for the health of correctional agencies, staff and families

WE HAVE A NEW LOOK!



Visit our new website! Thank you, webmaster Kevin Fincel with [Fincel Design](#), Steve Mayotte, and Daria Mayotte for your working diligently to make this happen—and so beautifully. And thank you, TC Brown, for your photos!



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

CATERINA SPINARIS



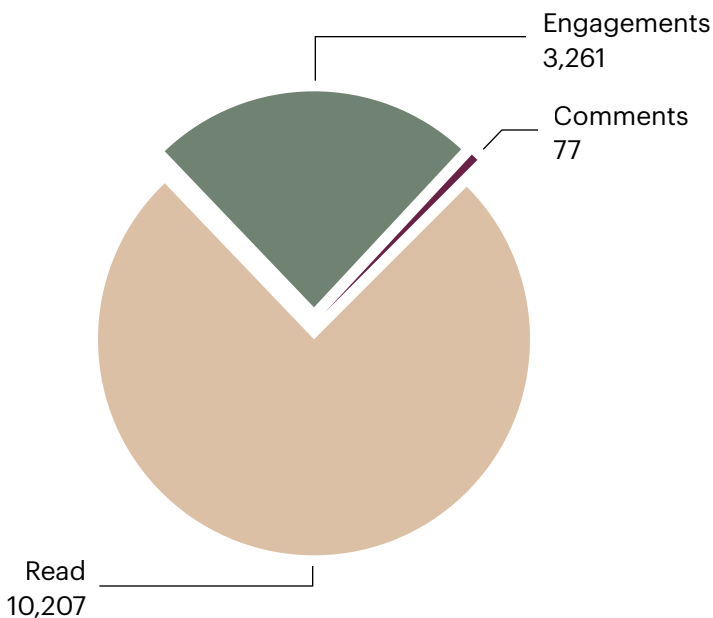
We posted the following article from a wife of a correctional officer on Desert Waters' [Facebook](#) page on the 2nd of August 2021.

The response was remarkable. 10,207 people were reached by the 17th of August

2021, with 3,261 engagements, and 77 comments. It is obvious that this post hit a raw nerve. That is why we dedicated this Correctional Oasis issue to family matters.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO MY HUSBAND?"

"I wonder what happened to my husband since he became a corrections officer. He used to be so easy going. He'd laugh and joke, and didn't complain much about things. Now, after five years in the system, he's all somber. It's like he can't enjoy anything. He's also become paranoid. We don't go out together much anymore (he's sleeping in the evenings before going to work), but when we do, he insists on sitting with his back against the wall. He never used to be so uptight before. And he's so negative! He finds fault with everything and everyone. He tears me down all the time, and he's become very strict with our kids. Actually, I think they're now afraid of him. And he went from drinking lightly and only on the weekend, to drinking quite a bit every day when he gets off work. No surprise, he's gained weight. Now I avoid him. I'm tired of walking on eggshells around him, yet I can tell that he's miserable and I feel for him. And I fear for our marriage and for our family. Please help me understand!" At the bottom of the post, we added, "How would you respond to this woman's plea for help to understand what's going on with her husband?"



Data from Facebook post



CORRECTIONAL OASIS

Here are some of our readers' replies, reprinted with permission.

"Your husband may need to find another job. Working in a correctional environment is often very challenging because we are dealing with convicts who are assaultive, manipulative, lack common decency and have no regard for anybody other than themselves. Working in prisons involves working short staffed and long hours. If your husband is always miserable and negative with you and your children like you stated, he's probably like that at work too and other staff may not want to be around him either...and heavy drinking every day? Your man needs help. EAP or counseling would benefit your husband (and you). If your husband declines to do so, I would recommend he seek a different line of work. Being a correctional officer is an honorable profession that involves a variety of skills while often working in a stressful environment. This job is not for everyone...." **Bob Tapia**

"He who stares into the abyss long enough surely the abyss shall stare back into him." **Anonymous**

"I worked corrections as an RN and the environment as well as the extreme electronics in a prison camp may be impacting him. Maybe pray for another type of job? The best I can do is pray real hard." **Anonymous**

"I am so there!!! Praying for your family! I know the pain! If he would like to talk I am more than willing to give you my contact information so we can talk!! You all are not alone!" **Sam Kroeker**

"The job changes you, but if you can talk to your partner about how you feel, it helps. Talking to a group or just someone in the same situation knowing you are not alone and sharing experiences helps. Sometimes we don't even realize our behaviors follow us home. Communication and an outlet, and sometimes just silence." **Anonymous**

"I worked in corrections for 10 years and have 2 adult sons in the business. First, I want to say your husband is actually protecting you by sitting with his back to the wall (hyper vigilant) watching for anything going on that could kick off or cause you and your family harm (my sons do this). Thank him for protecting you. In today's society anything could happen anywhere, unfortunately. In regards to the other issues, has he taken the classes from Desert Waters? If not, he should (read the info he brings home). My advice and humble opinion is do everything you can to understand it, the job and pressure, why they do what they do, etc., and I'm not saying this gives them any excuse or free pass for their behavior or anything else but... understanding it, really understanding it will help you with next steps, hopefully as a couple and with a stronger relationship." **Lori Cooley**

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

"Read the books by William Young - Author/ Podcaster - '[When Home Becomes a Housing Unit](#)' and '[The Nothing that Never Happened](#)' to help her understand what happened and why. Get counseling for all of you and explore what if anything that his department offers for mental health." **Jim Carpenter**

"My wife understands why I need to sit where I do. When you go out, ask him where to go, or, if you know, just go there. Know when he will need to tap out of social situations. I can't be comfortable in crowds. What does work? Camping, fishing, long breezy walks? The drinking and kids being fearful is an issue. He needs to have someone he can vent/talk to. Does he have friends that aren't in uniform?" **Matt Stone**

"As a wife of a CO I know some of this is symptomatic of the job. When we go out to eat with his coworkers they will fight over the seat facing the door. The other could be a form of depression. There is a lot of stress that goes along with the job mostly coming from overseers. My husband had two heart attacks at age 46. See if he will talk about it, and pray a bunch. Prayers" **Sherri Wells**

"First I must say that you are not the only one. Knowing that my family was not the only one going through this helped. I found comfort in talking to other CO wives. My husband has served in max prisons for over 14 years. Our life revolves around him. Why do you ask? Doesn't seem fair you say? His job is worse. No matter how bad a day I have had, his will always trump mine. Every day, he goes to hell and hopes that he and his brothers and sisters in blue get out alive. He has witnessed the worst in humans. He has endured a war zone...people hurting people, hurting themselves, and dying. He can't erase the horror film in his head. He is hyper-vigilant and can rarely turn it off. The skill that protects him in those four walls and keeps others alive, becomes a parking brake on daily activities. I have learned to accept that sometimes he just can't and I need to wait until he can. I take care of the 3 kids and the dog. I take care of anything that has to do with people- doctors, schools, events, dentists, phone, shopping, family...he has been conditioned to trust less and has trouble when there are a lot of people...awards. graduations, concerts, weddings, funerals...he needs rest...although terrors often haunt his dreams. We have a dog who sleeps between us. She keeps him and me safe at night. Getting punched in your sleep because he is dreaming that you are the monster in his bed is scary. I don't sleep soundly anymore. His life has forever changed the kids. The kids understand. They don't like it but they understand. He misses a lot...sometimes because of working doubles, his wagon wheel schedule, or sometimes because he can't be with others. When they are together, he can be the amazing man I married or he can be a scary version of himself. He yells. The rules constantly change. He has what we call temper tantrums. We know why they are happening but we can't stop them. He always apologizes. People often wonder why CO wives stay. This is not what we signed up for when we got married. This is not the happily ever after we were promised. For me, it is a daily choice to do everything I can to protect the man I love and be a rock for him. A steady place away from the hell where he works. There are many names for what our husbands suffer from PTSD, compassion fatigue, and stress. Counseling helps, but most COs won't go. Mine won't. It's considered a sign of weakness. He does have a select few friends that he can share some of his war stories...I suggest reaching out to fellow COs. I decided a long time ago that I will stay. I will try and I will help. It makes him love me more but daily my heart takes an emotional beating. I hope this helps."

Anonymous



A FAMILY AFFAIR

CATERINA SPINARIS

A prior version of this article was published in the June 2018 issue of the Correctional Oasis.

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 overtime. But they do not yet know how these work conditions translate in real life, or how they can affect your family life and your well-being.

Your family members usually do not know or understand:



CORRECTIONAL OASIS

- that, when you enter the corrections workforce, they too will be entering 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 them
- 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 address 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, in addition to you acquiring desirable new skills, you might also be shaped negatively by the job, and so 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
- that their ability to intimately "connect" with you may be impacted as time goes by, possibly eventually you two becoming strangers to one another at the emotional level (*Explaining to your partner what life behind the walls or in the field is like often proves to be too unpleasant to you, too energy consuming or too difficult to do. And you don't want to be talking about work when you are home. You also do not want to scare or traumatize your spouse, or you cannot discuss a case under investigation. So, conversations might tend to stay shallow, superficial, with you typically answering the question, "How was your day?" with "Fine," regardless of what has actually happened that day at work. After a while, your spouse may feel like they do not know you anymore, and/or they may stop asking you questions*)
- your being chronically physically and emotionally exhausted, and not having the energy or motivation to do much when off work; why you no longer want to engage with the children like you used to do (*And your spouse may get angry at you about that*)
- why you are steadily gaining weight, with your blood pressure and blood sugar readings no longer falling in the normal range
- why you are becoming more impatient, irritable, or prone to anger outbursts for no apparent reason (*Your spouse may snap back at you, resulting in verbal clashes that you are likely to win, just because you are well practiced at doing so at work. Only the victory at home comes with a steep price tag of emotional distancing and something dying inside after each such fight. And the fact that your fuse keeps getting shorter may quite simply scare your loved ones. As a result, they may avoid spending time with you or discussing sensitive or controversial family needs and issues, again leading to emotional distancing and disconnection*)
- why you have increased your alcohol 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 have developed gallows humor that may be appalling to them, rendering you not very likable to them, and perhaps even repulsive
- why the sky-rocketing, shocking to them increase in your use of profanity, often regardless of who is present;
- why you are becoming harder, more calloused, or judgmental of others (*Your stinging comments about people stun them: "What happened to the person I married?"*)
- why you seem to be indifferent when you hear about instances of harm befalling on people, and your apparent lack of compassion (*A spouse once asked me, "Does this come with the job, or is he just heartless?"*)
- why you talk to strangers curtly, perhaps even aggressively, apparently assuming the worst about them (*Your family members may be embarrassed by your behavior, thinking that you are being unnecessarily mistrusting, biased against certain groups of people, and no longer kind, considerate or objective, which can lead to friction between you*)
- why you talk down to them in ways that they find to be demeaning, insulting and hurtful, ordering them around and 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 running background checks on their friends and their parents (*Your spouse cringes when you say things like, "I'll make sure that none of MY kids ever become inmates!"*)



- your objections as to why they must not go to certain places or associate with certain people (*They find your increasing concerns about danger and your pervasive mistrust of people to border on paranoia that interferes with normal social functioning*)
- why you turn down invitations to family gatherings, school events, or other social activities (*They may end up going alone, feeling more like a single parent than a partner in a marriage, raising the children and running the household on their own—no longer enjoying the teamwork they used to have with you*)
- why you are starting to show signs of serious anxiety, alcohol abuse, depression, or post-traumatic stress

- why you cannot get through a sleep cycle without thrashing, yelling, kicking and punching in your sleep (*This happens so often that even sharing the bed with you—when they get to do that—becomes an issue*).

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.

I believe that it is also imperative, and a moral obligation, that corrections agencies help equip adult corrections family members with effective strategies for dealing with the “bleeding” of correctional work stressors into family life.

Helping corrections families is not simply something to be addressed haphazardly, as an afterthought, or once a year during a Family Day. Rather, this goal must be pursued rigorously and systematically, starting on graduation day at the Training Academy.

Doing so is truly a win-win both for employees and their families, and for the agencies for which they work. Employees and their family members should be handed “hazmat suits” to wear as they tackle correctional work stressors. And agencies would benefit because an unhealthy family life will inevitably mar work performance and even employee retention.

FAMILY TIME

CO RON MASON

After their shift is finished and they return home to their family, Corrections Officers must first shed the stink of where they have been, hide the hurt that they endured during their work day, and provide a smile. Pretend that they weren't just in a cesspool, and be nice and clean for family time.

During family time, while 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.

Bed time. The time I fear, the time I know I will have to relive my fitful fears over and over in my continually 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. Really, they always scare me.

I wake up for work. Time to do it again. What will I see today?



EMBRACE THE MOMENTS
THAT MATTER!

DESERT WATERS FAMILY RESOURCES

USE THE LINKS BELOW TO ACCESS CONTENT

STAFF
STORIES

STAYING WELL

WHEN HOME
BECOME A
HOUSING UNIT

PASSING IT
ALONG



The 4-hour Correctional Family Wellness™ course offered as **direct delivery** to adult correctional family members or as an **Instructor Training** for your Instructors to offer the course to adult family members of your employees.

IN MEMORIAM

Steven Mazzotta, Deputy First Class,

Lee County Sheriff's Office, Florida

Barbara Stanish, Parole Officer,

LaPorte County Sheriff's Office, Indiana

Michael Taylor, Deputy,

Sumter County Sheriff's Office, Florida



Quote of the Month

"The happiness of your
life depends on the
quality of your
thoughts."

~ Marcus Aurelius

MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



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DWCO Mission

Advancing the well-being of correctional staff and their families, and the health of correctional agencies,
through data-driven, skill-based training

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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.



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