

19
YEARS

HELPING CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES BECOME WORKPLACES OF CHOICE!

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A Desert Waters Publication

FEBRUARY 2022

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Volume:19

Issue:2



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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The Japanese have an art form that has evolved from mending broken pottery. It is called KINTSUGI, which means golden joinery, or KINSTUKUROI, which means golden repair. Artists who use this art form repair broken pottery by mending areas of damage with coating covered or mixed with powdered gold, platinum or silver.

Pottery repaired in this manner is considered to be more beautiful and more unique than it was when it was still intact, before it had been broken and ever so carefully and tenderly repaired.

And it is, indeed, more beautiful than before, with veins of gold running along its side, shimmering and glimmering, and making the pottery vessel functional and usable again.

I wonder if the same may not apply to us.

We all have areas in our lives or in our person where we have experienced “breaking,” even getting shattered. As fragile human beings, as time goes on, we simply cannot escape getting cracked and chipped and fractured as we encounter the ups and downs of life, and as at times we make choices that are not the wisest.

Yet, as we choose to pursue our mending, through whatever means work for us—psychological, physical and/or spiritual—we and those around us may be delighted to find out that the person that emerges after the “repairs” has far more depth and richness of character and wisdom to tap into than the person we were prior to our “breakage.”

Yes, we too can become more beautiful than we were before, with our soul scars covered with the gold of healing and wisdom that come from receiving the love extended to us, and working through our pain in healthy and even noble ways, taking the “high road.”

So, I wish a Kintsugi new year to us all! We can only benefit from such an approach to hurts and failures as we, imperfect people, make our way through an imperfect world.



AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

Historians tell us that in 1736 Benjamin Franklin pointed out to the citizens of fire-threatened Philadelphia that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

This statement emphasizes that when we know that there is a substantial risk that a certain hazard will occur, it pays off to do what we can to reduce the likelihood that this hazard will befall us. The energies poured into such preventative efforts are likely to give us a high return on our investment by preventing ripple effects of suffering, possibly irreparable harm and even possibly loss of life.

These are reasons why prevention should be an essential component and a foundational principle of corrections staff wellness programs.

Sound research studies have established that corrections staff face a formidable occupational hazard which, for ease of discussing it, I call Corrections Fatigue. (By Corrections Fatigue I mean the cumulative and combined negative effects of all types of occupational stressors encountered in corrections work.)

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Benjamin Franklin

Research has also shown that the risk, the probability, that this hazard will impact individual staff’s lives is fairly high, especially for Corrections Officers working in high security institutions. For example, we know that throughout their corrections career staff will be repeatedly exposed at least indirectly (if not also directly) to potentially psychologically traumatizing work incidents that involve violence, injury or death, or threats thereof.

And we know, according to the Diagnostic Statistical manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), that such exposure can lead to the development of PTSD. We also know that PTSD often occurs together with other mental health conditions such as Major Depressive Disorder, Substance Use Disorders and Generalized Anxiety Disorder,

all of which erode psychological and physical health (Carleton et al., 2020; Lerman, 2017; Spinaris & Brocato, 2019).

Therefore, it is imperative that staff be prepared, and policies and work conditions be in place to confront this foe.

No employer would ever consider sending workers to a toxic spill without extensive training as to how to handle such spills and without adequate personal protective equipment. Similarly, no fire department would send firefighters to a fire without extensive prior training as to how to attack different types of fire, different types of burning materials, and different weather conditions. And no firefighter would be sent to fight a fire without a wide array of the most up-to-date fire-fighting equipment. Lives depend on doing so—both the firefighters' lives and the lives of the ones they are dispatched to help.

To use a medical example, which physicians would you go to: physicians who wash their hands and who use fresh pairs of gloves when examining patients, or physicians who do not wash their hands and who do not use clean gloves, but who reassure you that, if you get infected after they examine you, they will prescribe a course of antibiotic treatment to deal with that infection?

Along the same lines, it is unacceptable to send corrections personnel to highly interpersonally complex and physically dangerous work environments without appropriate armor—their personal protective equipment for the soul. It is equally unconscionable that staff routinely operate under work conditions that corrode health and undermine their well-being, with no research-supported measures intentionally and proactively in place to counter these effects.

Such protective gear, the equivalent of the ounce of prevention, need to be based on a three-pronged approach: (a) individual—bottom-up efforts, (b) coworker/peer—horizontal efforts, and (c) administrator and supervisor—top-down efforts. All three of these levels of prevention are essential for staff well-being and for healthy workforce cultures to mitigate the poisonous effects of corrections occupational hazards.

Administrators are well aware of the value of and necessity for emergency safety preparedness training. Prevention at the individual level is essentially a type of emergency preparedness for the soul. It includes training staff to recognize occupational hazards, skills for reducing and even overcoming harmful effects of traumatic exposure and other high-stress work conditions, self-care skills, post-traumatic growth skills, and resilience-promoting skills. Such training can help staff in crisis or under chronic stress identify what is happening, and guide them to make appropriate choices. And it can help prevent or reduce the likelihood that

staff will become overwhelmed and/or that they will make poor decisions when in crisis or under chronic stress.

Prevention at the coworker/peer horizontal level includes training and practices that foster supportive work environments, such as the teaching of social intelligence skills, and satisfaction of the Big 7 needs as taught in Desert Waters' courses—the needs for physical safety, psychological safety, trust, power, respect, connection and meaning.

Prevention at the administrator and supervisor top-down level includes the adoption of policies and procedures that protect staff well-being, such as policies that do not routinely interfere with biologically essential functions (for example, policies that allow for staff to get sufficient amounts of sleep); transformational and servant leadership training; and the dedication of funds and services to staff wellness programs and interventions.

These trainings and work conditions must be implemented regularly, consistently and continually. They cannot be expected to bear good fruit if offered only once or for a season. They must be a mainstay, not the flavor of the month, and expanded and added on as new needs and circumstances arise.

And since we know that, in spite of our best efforts, some people will be affected by the relentlessly stressful work conditions and also by interactions between work conditions and personal situations, agencies must provide corrections-specific clinical services for treatment and recovery. These include trauma-responsive and corrections-specific Employee Assistance Programs with ample number of sessions at no charge for staff and family members; adequate health insurance coverage for mental health providers in the community, substance abuse treatment, and hospital stays; and appropriately trained peer support teams.

Both prevention and treatment resources are indispensable in corrections workplaces. However, providing only or mostly treatment or post-incident services fails to adequately address foreseeable (and in some ways inevitable) harm and suffering.

We at Desert Waters believe that it is absolutely a moral and ethical obligation for corrections agencies to embrace rigorous



and robust prevention measures in addition to implementing early post-incident interventions by offering timely services after an employee succumbs to occupational stressors. In the most serious cases, this might also be a legal obligation.

And it is important to remember that the health of a corrections organization and its ability to fulfill its mission can only be as good as the health of its workforce.

In line with what is presented here, a research paper on first responders' work-related post-traumatic stress concludes that "... it is essential that most organizations invest on first responders' training and equipment; however, author suggests that *organizational investment with additional funds and resources for first responders' mental preparedness (e.g., trauma preventative training) should also be prioritized as a way to equip first responders against the risk to develop PTSD and other comorbid disorders.*" (Papazoglou, 2017, p. 8-9) (Emphasis added.)

Quality of life and literally people's survival depend on these measures – both staff's lives and lives of the ones they are tasked to manage and help – incarcerated individuals, probationers and parolees.

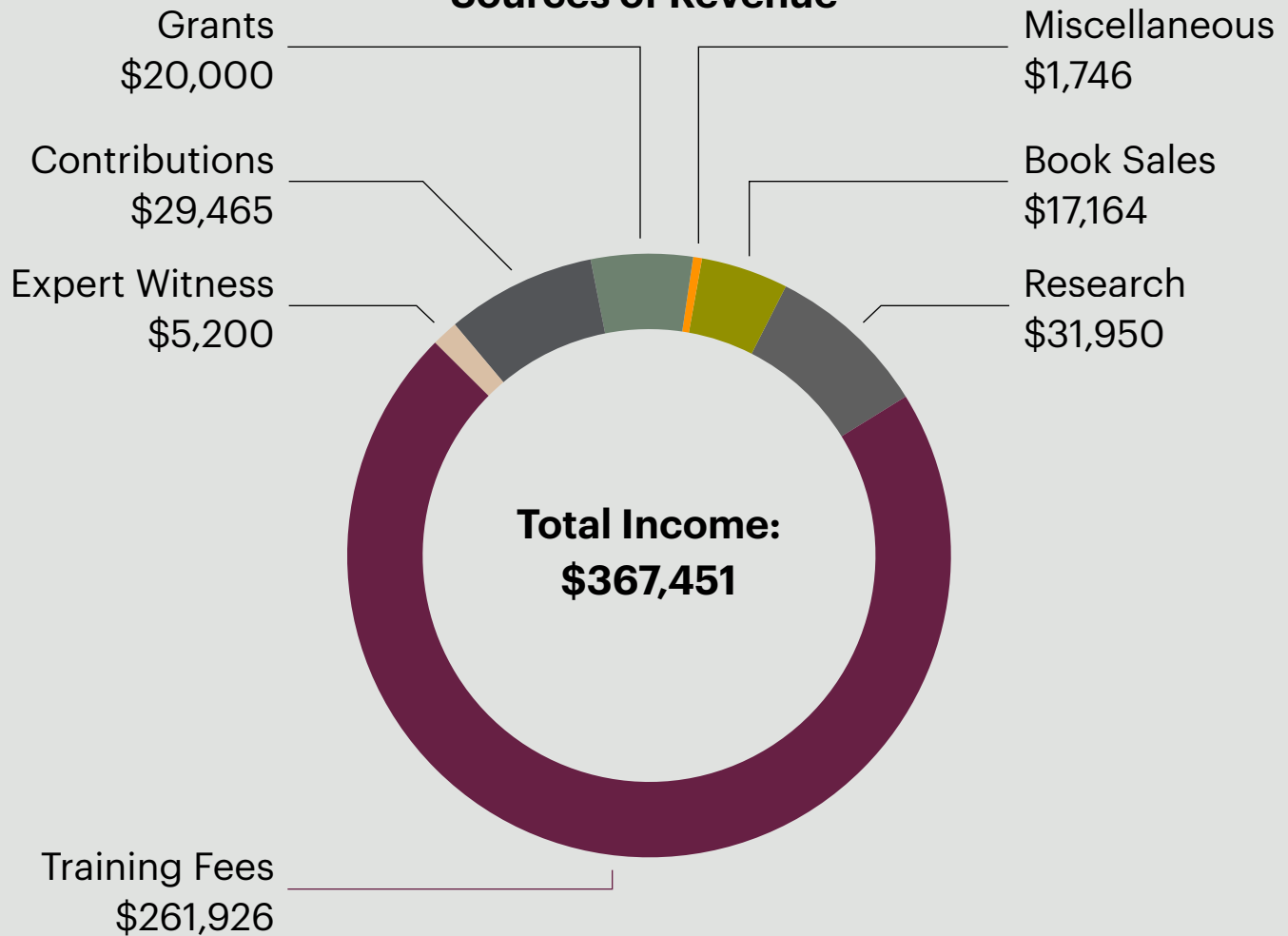
Indeed, as Benjamin Franklin advised long ago, in life's weighing scale, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Sources of Revenue

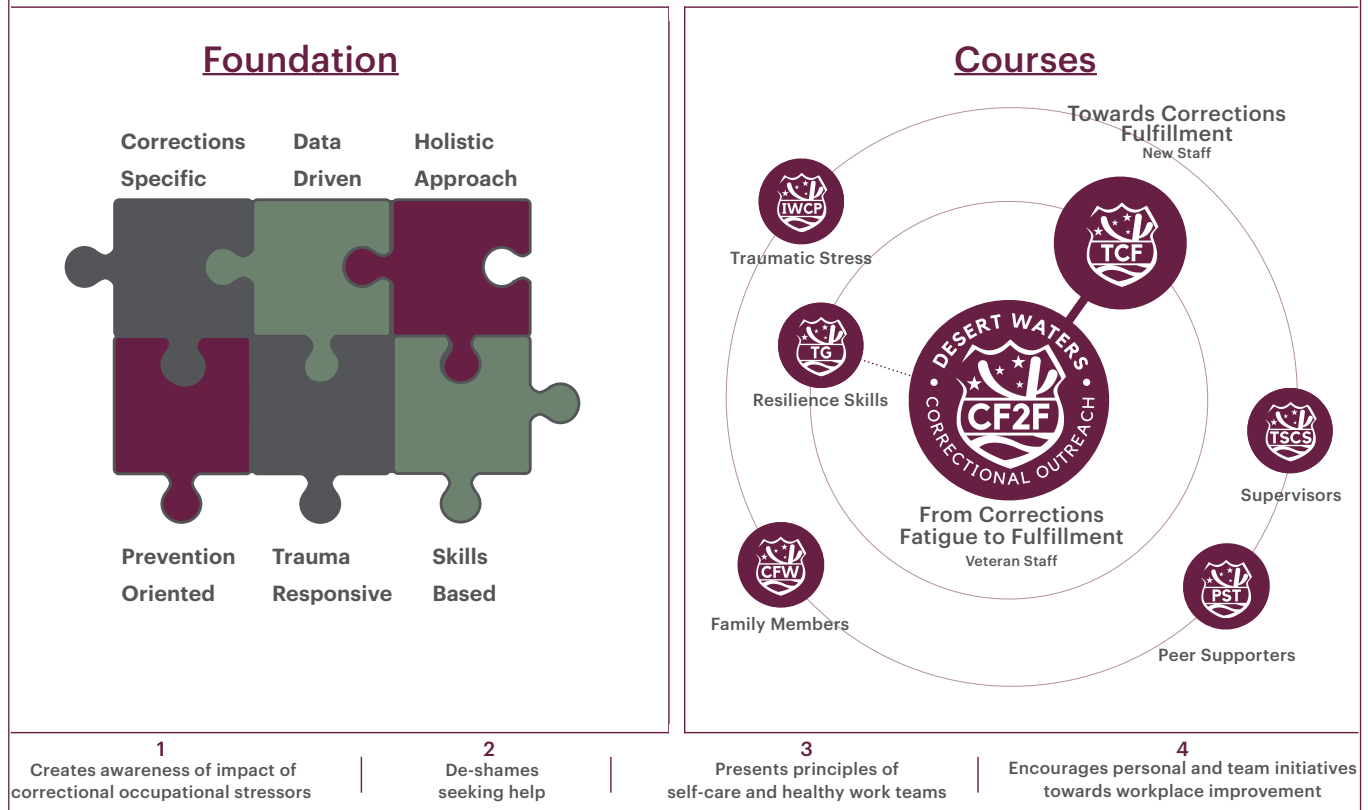


ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2021

- Trainings offered:
 - Direct delivery: 5 (In person)
 - Instructor Trainings: 7 (6 in person, 1 online)
 - Webinars: 6
- New courses designed: 2
- Books sold: 1,825
- Donated books: 206
- New website design
- Conducted one research study for a correctional organization
- Provided expert witness testimony on the health impact of corrections work and COVID-19 on corrections officers

OUR FOUNDATION AND TRAININGS

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH STAFF WELLNESS TRAININGS



The mission of Desert Waters is to advance the well-being of correctional staff and their families, and the health of correctional agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training. Research has repeatedly identified that occupational stressors affect corrections staff adversely and to a significant degree. Because of that, corrections staff wellness is an essential area of study and intervention that must be systematically addressed for the benefit of all involved in the criminal justice system.

Desert Waters' educational materials address those issues because they are:

1. **Corrections-specific**, having been developed from the start specifically for corrections staff and their families, are geared to issues pertinent to this population, and are based on studies and clinical experience treating this population in psychotherapy.
2. **Data-driven**, based on research conducted by Desert Waters and other researchers with corrections staff of a variety of ranks and job roles, and they are also based on research findings regarding other populations, such as the military and first responders.

3. Based on a **holistic approach**, including the wellness needs of custody front line staff and civilian staff, veteran and new staff, managers of all ranks and levels, and family members of veteran and new staff. This holistic approach also includes addressing the wellness needs of the overall workplace culture.
4. **Prevention-oriented**, in order to equip staff with skill sets to foster healthy workplace environments and to prepare them to address future occupational stressors.
5. **Trauma-responsive**, going beyond acknowledging the effects of psychological trauma to presenting strategies, practices and conditions for countering these effects and for promoting health at the individual, team and organization levels.
6. **Skills-based**, offering concrete, practical and actionable approaches to combatting challenges in staff's professional or personal lives.



The Desert Waters' 8-hour proprietary signature course entitled **From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™ (CF2F)**, is designed for veteran corrections staff. CF2F received the **"2016 Commercial Product of the Year Award of Excellence"** by the *International Association of Correctional Training Personnel*.

The CF2F course is offered in five versions, for the following groups of corrections professionals:

1. Staff working in adult institutions
2. Adult probation and parole staff
3. Youth detention staff
4. Juvenile probation and parole staff
5. Administrators and supervisors (the latter being offered as a 4-hour course)

CF2F's version for new staff is the 4-hour course entitled **Towards Corrections Fulfillment: For New Staff™ (TCF)**.

These two courses have the same four objectives:

1. To create awareness of the impact of correctional occupational stressors on staff, their family life, and the workplace culture.
2. To de-shame and de-stigmatize seeking help for emotional struggles, by helping staff understand how and why they may have been affected by workplace stressors.

3. To present data-driven principles of self-care and healthy work teams and organizations.
4. To encourage staff to implement both personal and team initiatives that are taught in DW's courses and that are geared toward improvement of the health of the workplace.

In addition to CF2F and TCF, Desert Waters also offers the following courses:



True Grit: Building Resilience in Corrections Professionals™ (TG), the sequel to CF2F, but also a stand alone course, which offers resilience-promoting skills which can be implemented in one or all of three ways: (a) preventatively, (b) as part of wellness maintenance, and (c) after exposure to stressors.



Improving the Well-being of Corrections Professionals: Understanding, Acknowledging, and Overcoming Traumatic Stress™ (IWCP), that describes effects of psychological trauma and presents symptom-specific strategies and practices to reduce these effects both preventatively and following traumatic exposure.



The Supportive Correctional Supervisor™ (TSCS), which aims to equip supervisors with skills to support subordinates who may be experiencing a wide range of emotional distress, and with skills to manage their own distress, in order to promote healthy workforce cultures.



Peer Support Training (PST), which equips staff with skills for responding to fellow workers in emotional distress in order to help them work through their distress and problem-solve, when applicable.



Correctional Family Wellness™ (CFW), which educates adult family members about correctional occupational stressors and their potential effects on staff and families, and offers practical suggestions for family members to address and preempt corrections-related challenges on the home front.

At this time, five of these courses provide instructor certification—CF2F, True Grit, the trauma course (IWCP), and the family course (CFW).

Staff are your agency's most valuable asset. It's a new year and the best time to resolve to prioritize the health and wellness of your most valuable asset. Let us help you put the puzzle pieces together at your agency. The benefits can literally be life-giving.



"Correctional Family
Wellness™"

ONLINE INSTRUCTOR
TRAINING & INDEPENDENT
STUDY

2022 Online Instructor Training Dates

- > March 21-23
- > Nov 14-16

Times

- > 9am–3pm MT (8-2 PT, 10-4 CT, 11-5 ET)
Breaks included

30-hour

**Instructor Training
with certification**

Fee: \$1,095

ABOUT THIS COURSE

Desert Waters' proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness™" (CFW) presents information to adult family members about how corrections work experiences 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) as a 4-hour course, and also to adult family members of new staff as a 2-hour course. It is also offered to correctional employees as a 30-hour Instructor Training with certification (18 hours online and 10 hours independent study, followed by two 1-hour telephonic coaching sessions with DWCO's coaches). Independent study includes the books "Staying Well" and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit."



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?
- Organizational Ways to Counter the Challenges
- Help for the Family
- The Basics of Self-care
- Managing Your Emotions
- Family Scenarios

ABOUT CFW INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION

- 3-day, 18-hour, online Instructor training plus 10 hours of independent study; followed by two 1-hour telephonic coaching sessions with DWCO's coaches.
- Instructor candidates who complete all course requirements successfully are certified by DWCO for three years as CFW Instructors.
- DWCO-certified CFW Instructors can offer the CFW course, only to families of staff at their agency, as often as needed during their 3-year certification. They are not certified to offer the CFW course to employees of other agencies.
- As this is NOT a Master Instructor training, DWCO-certified CFW Instructors are not certified to train other instructors to offer the CFW course.
- Recertification after three years requires passing an examination and paying the recertification fee.

INSTRUCTOR SELECTION CRITERIA

- Prior Instructor certifications (recommended)
- Experience training correctional employees in classroom settings
- 5 years+ of working in corrections work settings (recommended)
- Experience having worked through work-related challenges in their personal life
- Ability to be empathetic and a good listener
- Ability to moderate discussions

COURSE AUTHOR AND INSTRUCTOR

Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC, is DWCO's founding Director and a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Colorado. Dr. Spinaris has been treating and training correctional employees and their families since the year 2000. She also develops wellness-related educational materials, and conducts research on correctional employee wellness. In addition to this course, Dr. Spinaris has also authored DWCO's signature course, *From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™ (CF2F)* which received the 2016 Commercial Product of the Year Award of Excellence by the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel; *True Grit: Building Resilience in Corrections Professionals™*; *Towards Corrections Fulfillment: For New Staff™*; and *The Supportive Correctional Supervisor™*. Dr. Spinaris is the 2014 recipient of the Colorado Criminal Justice Association's Harry Tinsley award, and the author of the books *Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff*, now in its third edition, and *More on Staying Well: More Strategies for Corrections Staff*.



DESERT WATERS
CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation (EIN 30-0151345) with the mission to advance the well-being of correctional staff and their families, and the health of correctional agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Provide information to family members about the possible impact of the job on their corrections employee loved one
2. Provide information to family members about the impact of the job on the family
3. Provide family members with resources and practical suggestions to address commonly occurring challenges at home related to corrections work

WHY THIS COURSE

Family may be the most important support system of correctional employees. And yet family life is often negatively affected by the inherent stressors of corrections work, at times seriously straining relationships, and impacting the well-being and functioning of all concerned.

Correctional families would benefit from:

- Being informed about how the corrections work environment can impact employees
- Being equipped with practical suggestions as to how to be supportive of their correctional employee loved one
- Knowing the basics of managing job stress when it intrudes on home life
- Being informed about the basics of effective self-care

WALK IT OFF!

BY JOE BOUCHARD

Think of a placid pond. It appears to you as absolutely still and smooth, like a clean sheet of glass. The pond looks so pure and peaceful that it almost seems that it is permanent. Suddenly, a huge stone impacts the center of the body of water. Waves break the calm and radiate outward in a forceful and inevitable concentric pattern. The wave splash over all parts of the shore.

Much has been written about stress and its many negative impacts. And much more is experienced every day in high-stress jobs like corrections. In corrections, there are many examples of a stress event that do not land directly on a person but are close enough to leave negative impressions. Like the sudden impact of the stone on a still surface, one stress event can touch many places in a quick manner.

Some examples of stress are:

- A colleague in another housing unit is assaulted.
- Dangerous contraband is found in the mail room.
- News of an escape from a facility nearby reached the ears of staff and prisoners.
- Budgeting constraints from the Capitol will necessitate changes in operation.

How does one deal with these in a productive and healthy manner? I believe that there are many components to this and they work together to alleviate the tension. Physical activity, done in moderation, is a tried-and-true way to mitigate what stress brings.

For me, walking has always been a great way to battle tension. I find that meandering along a well-trodden route allows my mind to untangle. Here are a few thoughts about walking as a tool to lower anxiety:

- It allows the brain to oxygenate and regenerate more so than if you were in a sedentary position. If you permit yourself to forget the tension, sometimes rote exercise will bring a solution to mind unbidden.
- Walking is a way to refresh from a cubicle or worn work area.
- Taking a stroll with colleagues can build camaraderie.
- Walking works for everyone: recluses, people who prefer few companions, and with large groups.
- It is a great way to beat a seasonal slump, especially in the higher elevations where winter lingers.

A simple walking program can motivate staff. This can be as easy as meeting at a predetermined time and walking the parking lot. Incentives can expand participation. Little gifts can truly move people to actions. A visual reminder

of progress may also help. This can be done in the form of a spread sheet or a board with names and distance goals. And the program can be daily – like a wider expansion of the Wellness Wednesday salad at lunch.

As I write this, my college is planning a Winter Walking Program. Seven different walking routes have been planned and posted. Three are outside the campus but no further than one half mile from the starting point inside the building. Four other routes are completely inside the main campus building. The longest of these inside routes is one half mile. We are considering incentives, logging, and possible friendly competition with teams.

Dealing with stress does not necessarily need to be complex. In fact, simple or even inelegant tactics can help in alleviating tension. A walking program is an extremely simple way to help battle stress. That, in combination with other healthy stress relieving methods, can help anyone ride the tumultuous waves of events.

Joe Bouchard is a seasoned corrections professional. He knows a thing or two about stress, having served in the Michigan Department of Corrections in a maximum-security prison for 25 years. Bouchard has worked as a librarian, writer, editor, trainer, discriminatory harassment counselor and steelworker. Though retired from corrections, he is currently the librarian at Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College and an adjunct instructor of criminal justice and corrections.



STAFF SUPPORT IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC

Instead of a reprieve, 2021 followed closely on the heels of 2020 in terms of relentless demands posed by COVID-19 realities on staff of all ranks and disciplines – front-line staff, mid-level supervisors and administrators.

FRONT-LINE STAFF

Based on an unpublished research study conducted by Desert Waters Correctional Outreach in 2021, and also based on our conversations with staff across the country, staff's biggest challenges in 2021 boiled down to health and functioning concerns.

Staffing shortages (that were perhaps already severe) worsened due to COVID-19, leading to high amounts of mandatory overtime work, and staff's partial chronic sleep deprivation becoming the norm at certain agencies. Staff have spoken to us about feeling trapped, stuck and having been taken hostage by their agencies due to having lost their freedom to go home at the end of their shifts.

Uncertainty about the implementation and efficacy of new policies dealing with COVID-19 realities, and frequent amendments to such policies, have added to staff's emotional burden.

Managing justice-involved individuals, who were worried about their own welfare in ways not encountered before COVID-19, increased line staff's emotional strain.

These concerns, together with fears about getting infected at work, resulted in staff's physical and emotional exhaustion, increased susceptibility to physical disease and psychological distress, and malfunctioning.

MID-LEVEL SUPERVISORS

Direct supervisors were tasked with managing an increasingly demoralized, emotionally volatile and exhausted workforce, even when they themselves may have been exhausted also.

ADMINISTRATORS

Those at their agency's helm were confronted by the need to operate in an ongoing fast-paced, problem-solving mode for grave problems never encountered before. With emotions running high, and with needs pressing, knee-jerk reactions may not have been infrequent. Policies got adopted and implemented at record speed, perhaps only to be amended or abandoned after they had been "test-driven" for a while, possibly resulting in confusion and turmoil in the ranks.

Across the board, mandated vaccination requirements have caused some individuals severe anxiety as they had to choose between keeping their jobs or declining the vaccine.

And staff across all ranks and disciplines experienced the grief that resulted when one of their own succumbed to the virus.

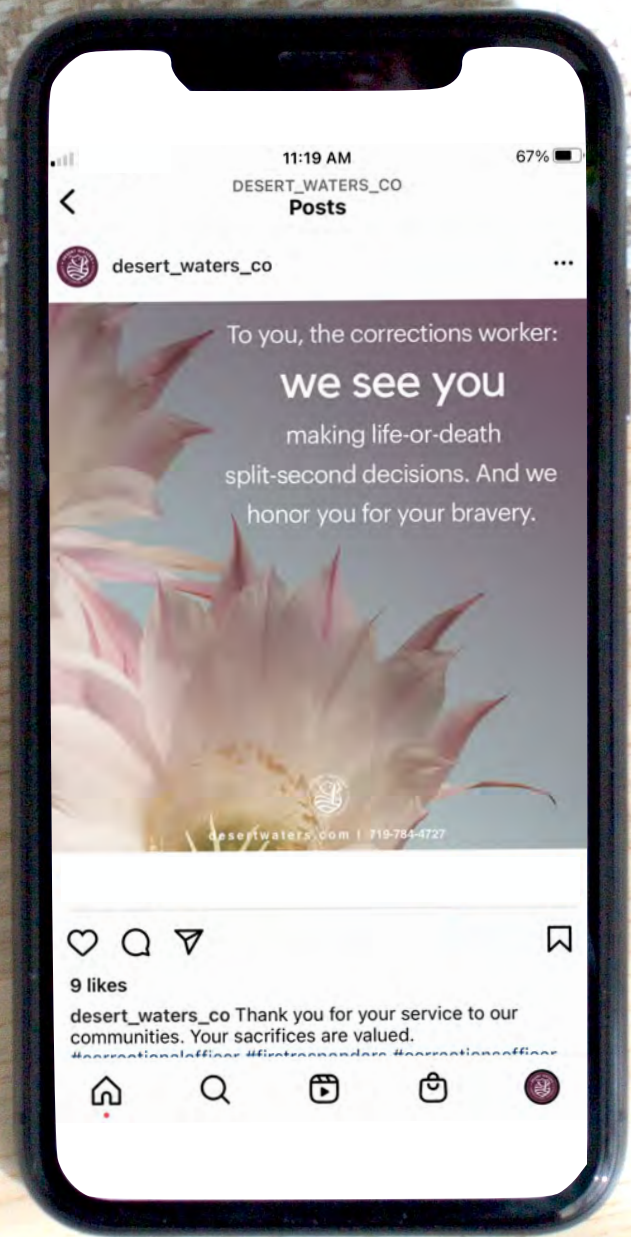
SOLUTIONS

Dealing with these complex challenges effectively requires wisdom, self-control, teamwork, tolerating uncertainty, bouncing back after mistakes, and learning from disappointments, losses and failures.

Administrators and supervisors **MUST** invest in their most valuable resource – front-line staff – like never before, genuinely encouraging, recognizing and affirming them, communicating with them regularly, inviting their input and involving them in some decision-making.

Salary raises may be one way to increase the number of new hires or to decrease turnover, though the workplace environment will often have the last word. Unless staff feel truly valued, they will continue to look for alternative employment.

Front-line staff will be wise to focus on what **THEY CAN** control and on ways to inject hope and positivity in their spheres of influence. And self-care – including leaving their agency, if necessary – must be non-negotiable, for the sake of their physical, psychological and spiritual survival.



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IN MEMORIAM

Robert Brown, Inspector,
Rhode Island Department of Corrections

Richard Carchia, Correctional Officer,
Rhode Island Department of Corrections

Ellen Condon, Correctional Officer II,
Douglas County Department of Corrections, Omaha, Nebraska

Melissa France, Corrections Deputy,
Oswego County Sheriff's Office, New York

Ryan Gaudet, Correction Officer,
Massachusetts Department of Corrections

Jordan Nelson, Corrections Officer,
Crowley County Correctional Facility, Corrections Corporation of America

Camron Passie, Corrections Officer,
Peoria County Sheriff's Office, Illinois

Paula Jo Tomlin, Correctional Officer,
West Virginia Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Quote of the Month

"Incredible change happens in your life when you decide to take control of what you do have power over instead of craving control over what you don't."

— Steve Maraboli

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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Your gifts are tax-deductible.

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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