

19
YEARS

HELPING CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES BUILD A MORE ENGAGED WORKFORCE!

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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From The Director's Desk

Safety Net

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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

A recent [article](#) dramatically validates why correctional staff wellness is indeed a MISSION CRITICAL subject. Indeed, during the past several years, correctional agencies across the country have acknowledged this need, and, as a result, have devised and implemented a wide variety of staff wellness initiatives.

We fervently believe that the time has come – or even that it is overdue – for these admirable, encouraging and innovative efforts to be organized and structured based on research findings, best practices and correctional realities.

That is why Desert Waters recently decided to partner with [Pursuit of Excellence](#) (POE) to develop a set of standards that could lead correctional and other public safety agencies to staff wellness accreditation. These standards represent best practices in the area of correctional staff wellness, and act as a practical guide for agencies to proactively and effectively demonstrate their commitment to protecting the wellbeing of their most valuable resource – the staff. The professionals at POE have decades of experience in standards development and accreditation through a variety of accrediting bodies in corrections and law enforcement. This joint effort is leading to the creation of Safety Net Wholistic Staff Wellness Accreditation Program, or Safety Net.

As we introduce Safety Net in this month's Correctional Oasis, we discuss the need for a staff wellness program, and explore possible reasons for and against such an undertaking.

We at Desert Waters believe that correctional staff and their families are worth the time, energy and funds that it will take to build, maintain and offer such a service.

And we [welcome](#) your thoughts on whether correctional agencies should pursue a staff wellness accreditation program or not.

Caterina Spinaris

SAFETY NET:

DEVELOPING A WELLNESS ACCREDITATION PROGRAM FOR CORRECTIONS

STAFF* BY GREGORY MORTON, MSC

In our role as correctional employees we are action takers and problem solvers. We don't like to allow problems to fester. We are trained to confront difficult, even seemingly impossible, situations. We are eager, sometimes even overly so, to address issues when we see them. We don't like unfinished business or letting obvious oversights go uncorrected.

However, there is one historical predicament that impacts all of us, but that few of us have ever addressed fully – the overall wellness toll that the profession itself takes on its practitioners. Instead, we have simply lived with it (stoically musing, “This is corrections for you”), even though recognition of negative effects of the job is not a new thing, as illustrated in this quote from 1980 regarding rookie corrections officers:

Watching their initial entrance into the prison can be quite an experience. The hope on their faces, the positive anxiety of their motivated gait—at first, it's all there. Then, slowly and almost methodically, the smiles wane, the expectations atrophy, and the desires to perform in a positive fashion succumb to escapist fantasy and verbally acknowledged skepticism. After six months to a year the period of hope and enthusiasm should almost be all over¹.

At Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, we call the cumulative effect of stressors inherent to correctional settings Corrections Fatigue^{**}. These stressors may be organizational, operational and/or traumatic. Organizational stressors stem from interpersonal practices, such as leadership and management styles, and from the manner in which corrections employees interact and “do business” with one another and with the justice-involved persons they are tasked to manage. Operational stressors derive from the technical peculiarities of the job, such as shift work and mandatory overtime, equipment issues, and physical plant issues. Traumatic stressors involve personally experiencing assaults or threats of violence, or from otherwise being exposed to violence, injury and death on the job directly (witnessing them in real time) or indirectly (learning about them at a later time).

We maintain that these adverse and practically inescapable occupational influences have not been addressed by corrections agencies as thoroughly as is needed in order to try to stem their often toxic consequences. These consequences are undeniable, given the national and international data that have been accumulating about the elevated levels of corrections staff's mental and physical health struggles that exceed prevalence rates in the general population and even rates of other first responders^{2,3,4,5}. These data match the anecdotal conclusions of most corrections veterans about the intrinsic difficulties of the corrections work environment.

As these formal, academic and informal, personal conclusions have surfaced, Desert Waters has been engaging in concerted efforts to address them and their causes by developing and delivering a comprehensive set of training programs as potential prevention and intervention measures. (See <https://desertwaters.com/training/>.)

One strategy offered by Desert Waters that agencies have used successfully is to train and certify some of their staff as Instructors for these courses, so that the training may carry on into the future, and so that wellness champions are planted into the organizational culture, acting at times as informal peer supporters.

The announcement of another strategy is the purpose of this communication. **Desert Waters is currently in the process of**

developing a staff wellness accreditation program that corrections agencies can employ to address employee health and wellness in a carefully thought out, systematic, and science-based fashion. The program is called *Safety Net Wholistic Staff Wellness Accreditation Program*.

Many agencies offer wellness resources for staff. For example, several have Critical Incident Response Teams, Peer Support Teams, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) available to employees and maybe for family members also through their governmental entities.

It is our hope at Desert Waters that these various resources and activities can coalesce into specific

wellness programs planned, resourced, managed, and evaluated by correctional agencies.

Corrections staff wellness programs may be selected after careful deliberation and consultation with other agencies and/or with subject matter experts. However, as staff wellness is a relatively new field in corrections, sometimes programs may be selected for reasons other than the optimal ones. Administrators may approve wellness-related activities simply because they are: “low-hanging fruit” – easy or affordable to implement regardless of relevance or effectiveness; the “flavor of the month” – popular at this point in time; someone’s “pet project,” or in order to a “check the box” for

the latest agency or legislative requirement.

When this happens, such programs might have several strikes against them from the start.

They may not: be data-driven/science-based; be backed by agency policy; be sustainable due to funding termination or administrative changes; include input from all stakeholders, including front line staff and labor unions, and thus may not address currently identified staff needs; involve sufficient resources to address identified staff needs; address key wellness areas; or evaluate the effectiveness of wellness programming.

Safety Net aims to address these problematic areas by aspiring to provide a methodical and comprehensive approach to corrections staff wellness by offering agencies a set of guidelines - a type of road map and a blueprint - for the construction and gradual expansion of corrections wellness programs. This blueprint is based on

...as staff wellness is a relatively new field in corrections, sometimes programs may be selected for reasons other than the optimal ones.

data-driven, state-of-the-art practices, and with the intent to provide regular future updates as warranted by new research.

Desert Waters recognizes that effective organizational wellness programs require interventions into the multiple dimensions that may contribute to employee stress and that promote employee resilience. Focusing on only a few dimensions of wellness cannot accomplish the intended goals of promoting staff wellbeing for the whole person.

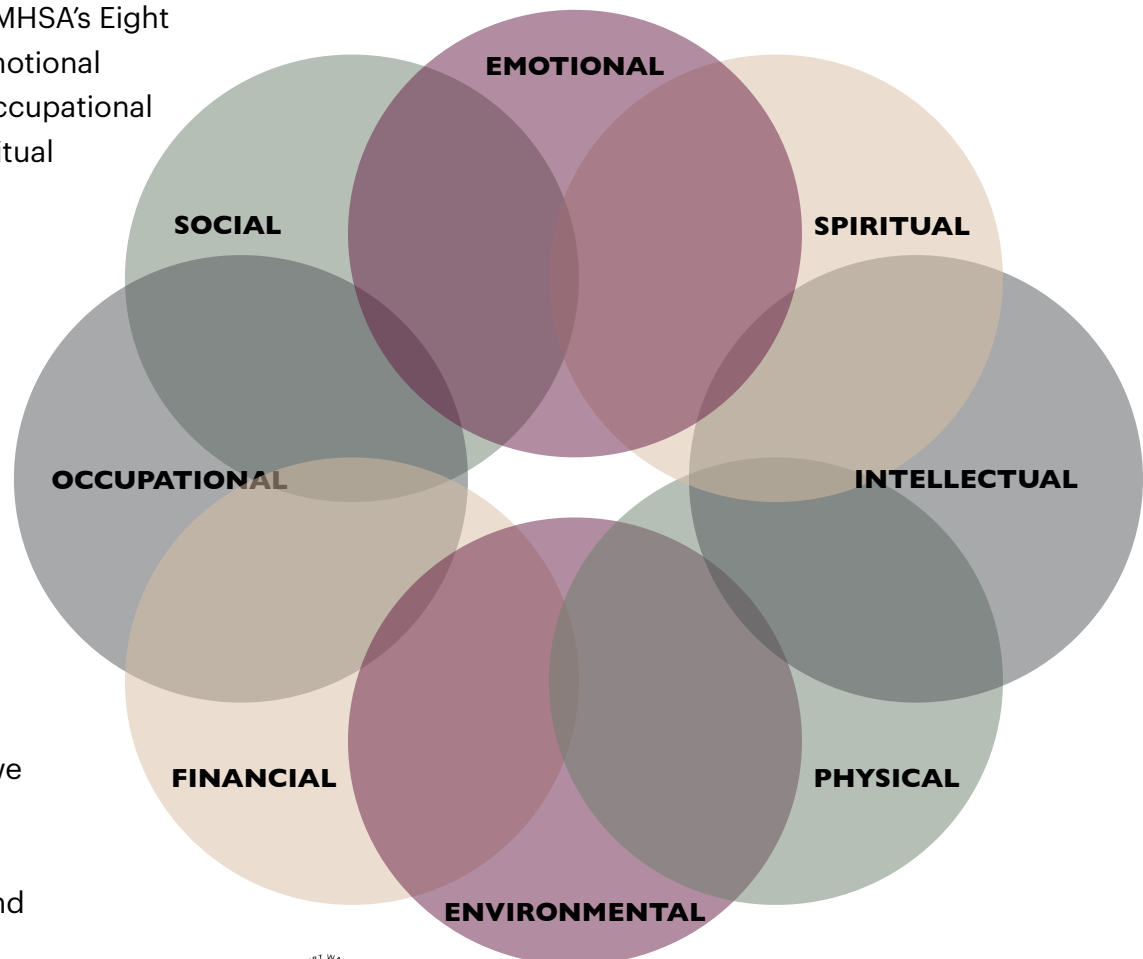
That is why Desert Waters has chosen to build the Safety Net Standards on the foundation of the Eight Dimensions of Wellness endorsed by the federal agency named the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)⁶. And that is why Desert Waters calls Safety Net a Wholistic Wellness accreditation program.

For the sake of clarification SAMHSA's Eight Dimensions of wellness are: Emotional Wellness, Physical Wellness, Occupational Wellness, Social Wellness, Spiritual Wellness, Intellectual Wellness, Environmental Wellness, and Financial Wellness. It may be obvious that the dimensions are interdependent, one influencing the other to a degree; but they are also sufficiently distinct from one another to warrant a separate mention and be standalone dimensions.

By applying SAMHSA's material to the corrections workforce, we do not mean to imply that all members of our profession are suffering from mental health and

substance abuse problems. We would ask you instead to focus on the principles found in these Eight Dimensions. We believe they apply to us all, especially since occupational data do show that anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress diagnostic criteria occur at a greater frequency in corrections than that of the general population.

In the following pages a variety of assertions for and against implementation of agency staff wellness accreditation are discussed. As you consider this strategy, we hope you find these comments useful. We recognize that change can come slowly, many times for good reason. **But the difference between a well-considered solution and the fad of the day is the amount of time, energy and focus that goes into choosing the proper course of action.**





SAFETY NET™

A Wholistic Wellness Accreditation Program



Catch The Vision!

REASONS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STAFF WELLNESS ACCREDITATION

1. We don't have the funds for additional employee health interventions/maintenance programs.

Adding new programs—staff surveys, trainings, system-wide interventions, counseling and support, family education, financial advice, pre-retirement preparation, continued research and resources—will require additional funding and will therefore cause agencies to incur additional costs. Since it is cheaper to operate with the services we currently have, it would be fiscally prudent to wait for economically healthier times before undertaking anything related to staff wellness further.

While it is fact that budgets are often strained for correctional organizations, it is also true that the absence of effective wellness programming for corrections workers leads to increased costs that would not otherwise be incurred. Research indicates that unhealthy and/or “fatigued” employees are more likely to: quit their jobs, use more sick days, require more doctor visits, use substances in excess, make more policy errors, engage in excessive uses of force, and create the necessity of costly overtime to cover their absences. It may be yet more anecdotal commentary, but when we ask corrections employees in our classes about the techniques they use to manage stress, the top two that are always mentioned are: alcohol misuse and calling off even when they are not ill, in that order. Collectively, employees with these tendencies are the building blocks of unhealthy and demoralizing workforce cultures—work environments lacking supportiveness of coworkers or subordinates; with excessive absences and turnover; lack of

acknowledgement of emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically taxing circumstances; reduced awareness of one's own wellness needs; and a reliance on unhealthy and expensive habits. Unhealthy employees are an expensive and Mission Critical liability for their agencies.

And one's own wellness needs expand far beyond those mentioned so far. One of the reasons that Desert Waters has chosen SAMHSA's Eight Dimensions, and that Safety Net focuses on Wholistic Wellness, is that wellness dimensions are more than the social, emotional, physical dimensions typically considered. Personal and Family wellness, Financial wellness, Environmental wellness at the work site, and an expanded sense of purpose and meaning through Spiritual wellness are all included in the Safety Net Standards.

2. Corrections is inherently difficult and therefore simply requires tough personnel.

The most violent and/or antisocial members of our population are collected according to the tenets of jurisprudence and then assembled all in one location. Daily and voluntarily corrections employees walk into their workplaces to keep order and ensure safety, and also promote prosocial behavior modeling and rehabilitative practices. Potentially traumatic and other types of high-stress incidents can occur and are expected to occur. This is not new. Employees knew of these conditions when they started. The physical environment and potential stressors and dangers are commonly recognized and acknowledged, starting at the Training Academy. “I had no idea” is really not much of a defense. Moreover, why would

we want to keep staff that can't stand up to the work pressures? Work conditions play a large part in the sorting process for who stays and who goes. This is probably no different from the influence on any employee in any working environment—a day-care center worker, a nurse at a hospital, a landscape contractor, a treatment plant technician, a roofer, and so on. "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." If you don't like it, you change jobs.

While it is a fair statement to say that corrections work requires toughness, it is also true that

"toughness" is an adaptation, perhaps even a maladaptation, that comes with a variety of consequences, both for the individual and the work community. We

become callous and emotionally shielded to protect ourselves from emotional pain and discomfort and from repeated experiences of a potentially traumatic or otherwise distressing nature. While this coping mechanism can be adaptive in the short term for individuals, as a long-term approach to dealing with the unique and repeated stresses of correctional environments, emotional numbing is not likely to promote high-functioning behaviors, and in fact it is one of the characteristics of Corrections Fatigue.

When we mask our feelings to an excessive degree, we gain some emotional protection, but we pay a large price for it. Emotional callousness and emotional numbing can easily carry over into our personal lives, leaving our family members feeling disconnected from us, and us from them. These

attitudes and habitual stance for dealing with distress bleed out into our community lives as well, further isolating us from potentially valuable support systems and sources of meaning.

Emotional callousness also promotes insensitivity and indifference, which rob a person not only of negative experiences, but also of positive ones. On a systemic level, insensitive/emotionally callous employees take a toll on newer employees by stifling their optimism, discouraging a natural and full range of human experience and emotion, and reducing new employees' capacity for empathy and sensitivity.

Wellness is not just a practice but also a set of values that can be communicated through one's interactions with others.

Moreover, emotional callousness and numbing are likely to encourage insensitive and even hostile or combative

attitudes toward

justice-involved persons, with all the consequent dangers and liabilities that these attitudes engender. Propagation of an ideology of "toughness" based on denial and shaming staff for experiencing distress in correctional environments is not an optimal approach to wellness for correctional cultures. It has some short-term utility as a means of immediate coping with difficult circumstances, but its negative long-term and systemic consequences to employee health and well-being, and to the health of workforce cultures, are likely to far outweigh its benefits.

3. Increased openness and education about the nature of health risks inherent to corrections work will provide lazy workers with an excuse to justify poor work performance or absenteeism.

It is not the employees who quit and leave who cause the greatest problem; it is the employees who quit and stay. Marginal cases, whose motivations are confusing and whose wellness outcomes can be debated, are a huge drain on the costs of an agency, and the morale of shifts and work units. Giving staff reason to blame the system and demand healthcare and wellness resources due to work-related health conditions will only make the financial drain bigger.

Realistically speaking, there will always be an occasional low-performance employee within the ranks of any organization. However, it is illogical to assume that full disclosure of the health risks and consequences associated with corrections work will result in a landslide of lazy or malingering employees. For one thing, employees already know the toll of the job, just through personal experience and through observation of what their colleagues go through. Refusing to acknowledge these facts and their consequences is a type of organizational denial, and, ultimately, a form of dishonesty.

Human beings naturally want to live healthy and full lives, as much as they can. In the face of stressful circumstances, people naturally adopt coping mechanisms that are to some degree functional for them. But they do not always choose good methods of coping, perhaps because they are not aware of all the options or how to implement them. People who abuse or take advantage of systems may do so at least partly because they are unable to adapt and succeed through more functional channels of coping and problem-solving. In fact, the best way to deter

employees from adopting such negative ways of coping may be by educating and equipping them to use optimal strategies and techniques for wellness sustainability, and by systemically cultivating a work community that is healthy, supportive, and committed to pro-wellness activities.

Effective and functional strategies for wellness maintenance, stress management, and the creation of a positive organizational climate are available. Administrators must be willing to blaze new trails and work against the grain of potentially entrenched and systemically dysfunctional practices and pessimistic thinking. They must also do so without iron clad guarantees of success. There are no such guarantees. Success usually emerges gradually through learning from repeated attempts and persistent efforts to solve a problem. Inaction, on the other hand, is a fairly certain path to continually high turnover rates, high sick leave rates, employee under-functioning, stress-related mistakes, oversights and accidents, unnecessary uses of force, and—only too often and only too tragically— employee suicides. Both history and empirical research⁷ support this view.

4. It is the individual employee's responsibility to take care of their own health and wellbeing, not the organization's.

Work is only part of an employee's day. No agency, no matter how large or small, can be expected to address all of the modern life pressures that each member of their workforce faces. Employees must be expected to take care of their personal lives on their own. We expect justice-involved persons to do so to a large degree. Having different expectations for employees would be bad corrections practice and also unmanageable both fiscally and logistically.

While it is true that individuals, and individual employees, are responsible to take steps both at work and outside of work to promote and maintain their personal wellness, the idea that individuals can do so while spending the majority of their waking hours in a systemically toxic work environment is untenable. Human beings are social creatures and the world is to a great extent socially constructed. Even the most radical or independent of individuals will experience a powerful amount of stress in the absence of support for their needs, beliefs, values and behaviors.

Typically, wellness activities and EAP programs do not adequately or proactively address the ways Corrections Fatigue impacts the organizational climate or culture of corrections agencies. If the organizational climate and culture remain negative, a vicious cycle ensues where jaded veteran professionals can stifle new employees' motivation by passing on dysfunctional attitudes and perspectives, thus perpetuating the negative influences of Corrections Fatigue. This is of course not true for all veteran corrections professionals, but it certainly occurs.

It is simply too much to expect individuals to immerse themselves in a high-pressure community, such as a correctional work environment, and be able to maintain health and well-being if the people around them (justice-involved persons or coworkers) behave in unhealthy or antisocial ways, or embrace destructive or antisocial values. Such communities result in diseased systems—environments that promote contagious and pervasive dysfunctions and disorders. Self-help and individual coping strategies for wellness maintenance can only do so much and for so long for workers immersed in such systems. It is for this reason that employee wellness must be addressed on an organizational level in addition to an

individual level. Even a healthy fish cannot stay healthy in a polluted pond.

In a top-down fashion, agencies must set policies in place that help promote staff wellness by creating work conditions that prevent the occurrence of certain stressors altogether, or at least reduce their impact. No amount of mindfulness practices, breathing exercises or yoga classes taught to staff can effectively counter the toxic effects of certain work stressors. Systemic, top-down interventions are needed as well.

It is without a doubt within the organization's best interest to do everything it can to ensure that their employees and work environments are healthy and configured in such a way as to promote wellness maintenance. Work performance is inextricably intertwined with employee wellness. Thus, the administrator who has an interest in optimal and safe performance of his/her employees cannot ignore addressing wellness maintenance as a prerequisite. This is true in general for all types of work communities, but arguably especially true for correctional work environments, given the inherent dangerousness and negativity of the environment, and given the inherent traumatizing potential for corrections professionals.

5. The effectiveness of programs addressing organizational, operational, and traumatic stress has not been proven.

An extensively researched approach is necessary before serious action is taken. While it is good news that studies could lead to data-driven programs for correctional employees' well-being, for now that effort is in the hands of experts and specialists. Corrections-specific causes may be felt or presumed by those of us who do the daily work and see the consequences first hand, but the rigorous scientific conclusions are only beginning

to be published. Therefore, we should wait until there is more evidence that the corrections workplace impacts employees negatively to warrant interventions on their behalf.

We need to remember that even our best science and research methods can only capture so much, and this is even more true in areas of interest as dynamic, complicated and elusive as are social systems and psychological processes. If we limit our willingness to act or make changes because the “correct” decision is not crystal clear or 100% certain, then we may be waiting indefinitely. Decision makers in correctional organizations, for the health of their employees and work communities, are best served by not only taking into account what available research literature is saying, but also what their personal experience and judgment are saying, what the consensus judgment of their peers and employees are saying, what the history of events in the organization suggests, and any other sources of evidence about what is really happening, such as feedback from employees’ families, and even feedback from the justice-involved persons who are observing staff and the way they function at work. The consequences of a default to the status quo are just too costly in correctional environments. We cannot continue to do the same things and expect different results. Suicide rates, for example, are highly elevated for correctional staff, corrections officers in particular³, and they will continue to be so unless new and systemic changes are made in correctional environments—changes designed to promote and maintain employee wellness.

Further, it is for these reasons that Desert Waters has selected SAMHSA’s Eight Dimensions of Wellness as its program structure, and that Wholistic Wellness is the intention. One of the reasons we encourage a comprehensive wellness

perspective is that wellness needs vary so greatly from employee to employee. A plan that proves effective for a new employee, emphasizing their unique Social Wellness needs as they enter a new profession, would be very different from the Social Wellness plan for an employee preparing to retire and leave corrections work after decades of immersion in the pressures of the profession. Research into the effectiveness of various activities is necessary at the organizational level, but “research” into what works for the individual is a personal experience that requires customized application.

To further address this issue, rigorous program evaluations are required to address program effectiveness. This must occur on a regular, at least annual, basis. At the organizational level in the administration of Safety Net, we in fact do require ongoing program evaluations.

Staff suicides represent the reddest of red flags indicating serious systemic wellness problems.

MORE REASONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STAFF WELLNESS ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

1. Reduced Staff Suicides

Suicidal thinking and suicide rates are highly elevated for corrections professionals relative to the general population³⁷. There is no debating this. It is a well-established fact. Staff suicides are not only directly devastating for spouses, children and loved ones, but also to the mindset of corrections employee cultures. Staff suicides attest to the presence of an overwhelming and pervasive sense of hopelessness. Suicides send powerful, reverberating signals, both inside and outside organizations, about the risks and potential toll of careers in the field of corrections—signals that influence the decisions of potential future employees who are considering career paths. To the extent that good prospects opt away from corrections due to its marred reputation, the profession and the quality of operations will be downgraded while positions remain unfilled.

Staff suicides represent the reddest of red flags indicating serious systemic wellness problems. While all employee suicides cannot be directly attributed to the toll of stressors and trauma inherent to corrections work, the well-established elevated rates particular to this field of work strongly indicate that suicide in fact is a hazard of the occupation. The gradual wear-and-tear suffered due to Corrections Fatigue may well render employees emotionally fragile, and thus more vulnerable and likely to succumb when faced with “last straw” losses that they would have otherwise been able to prevent or endure. Research indicates that individuals who take their own lives most often are lacking social and emotional support, and are feeling hopeless about the future, powerless to

change their circumstances, and/or worthless. These characteristics can be addressed both individually and systemically through wellness training on principles that overlap Emotional, Social, Intellectual, and Spiritual Wellness. The fact that systemic interventions at one police agency succeeded in bringing extremely high officer suicide rates to zero for a number of years attests to the fact that indeed, suicide can be stopped through the provision of comprehensive wellness services and resources⁸.

2. Reduced Operating Costs

Agency-specific research similar to studies conducted by Desert Waters and others can help agencies identify sources, sometimes veiled, that drive up agency expenses. You may have already explored or become familiar with some of these sources yourself. You might even be able to fit actual numbers into the discussion. For our purposes here, we cite Desert Waters’ 2012 study data submitted by all levels and disciplines of correctional employees.

- a) **Reduced overtime from unscheduled call-ins:** Desert Waters’ 2012 study² found that staff who met PTSD criteria (with 27% of all professions and ranks being PTSD Positive, and 34% of the custody/security staff) self-reported almost twice the number of sick leave days per year and three times the number of worker compensation days than those who did not meet PTSD criteria. The reality of security staff scheduling is that if the assigned

employee is absent, then a substitute must be found. In most cases this means that a fellow employee must work overtime. The cost for that post is a pay rate increased by 50%. As current circumstances show throughout the profession, the necessity of overtime work also aggravates the wellness of employees, particularly if it happens frequently. And so the Corrections Fatigue destructive cycle continues while the cash register rings.

- b) **Reduced medical costs:** Desert Waters' 2012 study also showed that PTSD-positive employees reported almost twice the number of doctor visits and listed twice as many stress-related chronic health conditions, with sleep disturbances, depression, obesity and digestive problems representing the top four chronic ailments. PTSD-positive staff reported significantly more use of alcoholic beverages per week, and tobacco uses per day, than the PTSD-negative group did. The potential impact of all of the above findings upon health care-related costs, not to mention quality of work performance and morale, are self-evident.
- c) **Reduced turnover:** Correctional employees stay in their jobs not only for income and retirement benefits, but also to contribute to an important and worthwhile societal function, and to generate a sense of meaning and connectedness to their work communities and the wider communities in which they live. Turnover costs in the field of corrections are enormous

relative to other industries, very likely due to the particularly difficult environments in which corrections professionals must operate during the majority of their full-time working lives. While corrections work will always be a particularly tough environment to serve in due to its unique risks and challenges, the necessary training and wellness resources must be available to equip workers for the task, and help them maintain their well-being over time. Reducing the high cost of turnover, and keeping it reduced, requires systemic level intervention and long-term commitment to implementing both data-driven and professionally recommended strategies. Successful interventions to improve the wellness of employees and systems can be expected to, over time, reduce both recruitment costs and training expenses. The better trained the workers are, the more "backing" they perceive to receive from their administrators and supervisors, and the more social support they provide each other, the healthier their workforce cultures will be, and the more frequently will essential wellness skills naturally transfer from one employee to the next, through on-the-job modeling and informal conversations.

3. Healthier Interpersonal Skills in Regard to Colleagues and Family

A sense of meaning is essential for human beings and cultures at all levels, including work cultures. Through Desert Waters' research studies and informal questioning of staff over the years, we have repeatedly encountered statements

characterizing coworkers of all ranks as a top source of work-related stress—often even exceeding the perceived amount of stress from interactions with the justice-involved persons they are tasked to manage. We hear complaints about other employees' bullying, rudeness, favoritism, unfairness, meanness, or laziness—to name a few. This feedback further reinforces the view that the cumulative stressors that figure into Corrections Fatigue are constituted to an extent by organizational practices and patterns of behavior among staff that are in fact manageable and perhaps even avoidable with a Wholistic Wellness perspective. Informal, anecdotal information was dramatically reinforced through a 2019 Desert Waters' study which found that the quality of staff's social interactions with their direct supervisors, coworkers, and justice-involved persons strongly impacted their Work Health (staff's morale, pride in the job and sense of physical and emotional exhaustion at the end of the day). And Work Health in turn very strongly impacted staff's family health and their mental health, and strongly impacted their physical health. In fact, the quality of these social interactions impacted staff significantly more strongly than exposure to traumatic material. Therefore, the benefits of work communities structured to address those issues are many: in terms of individual employee work health, mental and physical health, and family health; in terms of optimal and well-coordinated functioning of work communities; in terms of organizational reputation; and in terms of leadership, individuals who are respected and who inspire their employees in productive and functional ways.

Work performance is inextricably intertwined with employee wellness.

4. Increased Interpersonal Skills For Effective Management Of Justice-Involved Persons

The most effective corrections employees are those with the knowledge and skill to consistently model pro-social behaviors while expecting the same from the individuals they supervise. The basic concepts of role modeling, reinforcement, and re-direction are much more successfully accomplished when employees can attend to their work with minimal emotional disruptions. Many justice-involved persons are highly skilled at keeping employees off balance, and thus employees are easily susceptible to impulsive knee-jerk reactions of fight or flight. The same can be said of some problematic employees who adopt an adversarial and confrontational style with coworkers, leading to interpersonal clashes among staff. Employees with adequate training in

managing stressors inherent to their work lives, however, are less susceptible to being reactive or easily

manipulated, and better equipped to manage individuals in a manner that reduces emotional and behavioral volatility, while also promoting environmental order and control. And employees who are relatively well will likely be more able to apply de-escalation tactics, thus reducing the stressors that come with unnecessary conflict and staff injuries⁹. Wellness is not just a practice but also a set of values that can be communicated through one's interactions with others.

5. Improved Ability To Function And Enjoy Life Outside Of Work

One of the most dramatic results observed in Desert Waters' 2012 study of corrections worker health and well-being had to do with off-duty functioning. PTSD-positive employees demonstrated significantly higher depression, anxiety and stress scores, and significantly lower life satisfaction scores. In addition, they demonstrated significantly less ability to: maintain personal relationships, enjoy leisure time, effectively care for dependents, and carry out personal responsibilities. We have to wonder, what exactly did our loved ones do to deserve this from us as partners? Do our partners not deserve to be in relationships that are mutually beneficial and mutually supportive? Adequate partnership requires on-going wellness. Our partners stick by us in difficult times, and are often nevertheless "rewarded" by having us leave our best selves at work. Without well-informed and well-devised systemic level interventions to promote and maintain employee wellness, the impact of Corrections Fatigue will continue to spill over into the personal lives of corrections professionals—as if their work lives were not difficult enough. Balanced and healthy human beings need to be able to rest and enjoy their time away from work. They also need to have residual energy to invest in the nurturing of their primary relationships and their larger social support systems. This is true for everybody, regardless of their profession, but even more so for individuals who choose careers in an occupation as uniquely stressful and challenging as corrections, and for their families who made no such personal choice, but endure the experience in any case.

IN CONCLUSION

All that is required at this point is to seriously examine the merits of a Wholistic Wellness Staff Accreditation Program. We at Desert Waters believe that once the examination begins, the importance of staff wellness will become undeniably obvious, and the need for intentional planning for it more pressing and prioritized. We want your organization to be in the best position possible to protect the health of its employees and their families from the time of hiring through to retirement, to maintain the most orderly, healthy, and effective work cultures possible, and to establish and/or maintain your organizations as among the most reputable and successful. We fully recognize and honor the important functions your organizations serve for society and the risks your workforce takes in the universal struggle to contend with inherently challenging work conditions and critically important responsibilities.

If it was not clear to you already, it is probably clear now that we at Desert Waters have strong opinions about corrections employees' wellness, their workplace climate, and the causes and consequences of Corrections Fatigue. We do not, however, ask you to adopt an Accreditation program for your agency without careful and intentional consideration. You are the experts on your agency. All we ask is that you do undertake that deliberation, and that you do have those conversations and join in the dialogue.

We all want the same things, namely comprehensive wellness for you and the men and women of your agency's workforce. We hope this discussion takes us all closer to that destination.

*This article is partially based on an article entitled Corrections Staff Well-Being Programs—To Implement or Not? by Gregory Morton, Mike Denhof, & Caterina Spinaris, and published in the Correctional Oasis in 2012.

**Corrections Fatigue is an all-encompassing term that describes the cumulative and commingled effects of operational, organizational, and traumatic stressors on individual staff's personality, health, and functioning, and also collectively on the correctional workforce culture. Corrections Fatigue is not a clinical term, although at the more severe end of the spectrum, it involves physical and psychological health conditions. The degree to which Corrections Fatigue accumulates over time may depend interactively on the degree of presence of occupational stressors, staff's personal predisposition, staff's life circumstances outside of work, and the effectiveness of staff's coping strategies individually and collectively.

About the author: Gregory Morton has been a contributor to Desert Waters' wellness efforts for corrections staff, and a Master Instructor of Desert Waters courses since 2013. Greg started his career at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) as an academic counselor in the mid-1970s, and then served as OSP's Staff Training Coordinator for eleven years. He was the department's Staff Training/Professional Development Administrator, and Labor Relations Administrator until retirement in 2009. He holds a Master of Science degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, with a focus on the consequences of work-related trauma and chronic stress, and the rapidly expanding field of human neuroscience. Concern for the health and skills of the corrections workforce has been his motivation throughout.

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Staff wellness is not the agency's mission, but it is indispensable for the fulfillment of the agency's mission.

~ Gregory Morton

Quote of the Month

"Much of what we face can't be deterred, prevented or even predicted. Thus we need to become resilient."

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

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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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