

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 21

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- From The Director's Desk
- Finding Purpose in My Career
- Navigating the Holidays in Corrections: Finding Light in Dark Places
- Online Couples' Training for Correctional Staff & Families
- Weaving Positive Meaning
- Quote Of The Month



A Desert Waters Publication

## DECEMBER 2024




DESERTWATERS.COM

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

# FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As 2024 comes to a close, I'd like to share something personal. A dear friend recently reminded me that I've been working through Desert Waters for over 22 years to help improve the well-being of correctional staff. He then asked how I'd feel if I never witnessed large-scale, lasting improvements in correctional systems—essentially, if I didn't see the "success" I've hoped for. My response was simple: My goal is progress, not perfection.

I don't expect to see a complete overhaul of systems before I consider the efforts of multitudes of correctional professionals across the globe and our efforts at Desert Waters a success. For me, success in this complex endeavor of building wellness cultures comes from incremental progress. It's about seeing agencies and individuals take steps forward, even if those steps are sometimes followed by setbacks. I often remind myself that, in real life, progress is less likely to look like a straight line and more likely to look like a child's messy scribbles.



We at Desert Waters are not expecting correctional and other public safety agencies to leap from pitch-black darkness to the brightness of noonday sun in one dramatic change. Rather, we view our mission as gradually turning up a dimmer switch, making a room progressively brighter. Every person we help, every agency we work with, is a step in the right direction. I find encouragement and joy in even the smallest improvements—a single staff member, family member, or agency making strides toward better wellness and a more positive workplace climate, which will also inevitably benefit the justice-involved people that staff manage. All individuals and all systems matter.

What's needed on our journey is patience, tenacity, and a long-term vision for lasting change. Every step forward, no matter how small, is valuable and contributes to the larger goal, because even the smallest forward movements over time add up to make a better tomorrow.

*Caterina Spinaris*

# FINDING PURPOSE IN MY CAREER

BY JAMES HAYES, CORRECTIONAL PROFESSIONAL

**M**y outlook about my career changed after I could do something for myself, my peers, and coworkers on a professional level as well as on a personal level, which I'd been doing for years inadvertently. Now that role that I had been performing unofficially has a title: *Staff Wellness Personnel and **From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment (CF2F) Instructor***. After becoming involved with Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, their team, and their material, I felt an immediate sense of meaning, finding a purpose in my career which led to fulfillment in this career that I did not even know I needed.

Fast forward five years and the many CF2F classes which I have been fortunate to present, and learn from myself, I am a face and a name for staff wellness with Corrections. My title is one I take very seriously and am proud to carry. In this position of Staff Wellness Personnel and CF2F Instructor, people trust you, lean on you, and confide in you. This is to be taken seriously and with the utmost confidence. To be able to do this for a long time one has to maintain a healthy balance between confidentiality, professionalism, and openness. When presenting CF2F to a fresh class of new faces, I get the opportunity to meet new people, hear new stories, and live vicariously through their words and experiences. I feel with them, and I have my own experiences to share and provide feedback. We engage in a way the civilian world would wince at—and that's only the subject matter, not including our reactions or responses to situations. As the PowerPoint continues and we roll through the course, our conversations are ongoing. The class material speaks for itself - I'm just the lucky guy who gets to present it in a way that it gets processed, and the key to that is being GENUINE.

For example, in one instance, a correctional officer was struggling with many aspects of their job, and their bubble was burst. After learning this material delivered with genuine sincerity, their outlook was changed, and they have a new light for their career. The appreciation and gratitude of the attendees prove this course is based on fact and that it works. I'm fortunate to pass it along. The feeling the attendees get from the course is something I also feel while presenting this material to them.

Another course we offer is ***Correctional Family Wellness: For Adult Family Members (CFW-F)***, where we present similar material to the family members of correctional employees. This is a platform for me to relay the trials and troubles of operating in an environment as harsh and ugly as ours while adapting to the continual changes of policy, dealing with our individuals, and all that comes with human interactions. I get to be the link for our career-to-family communication. Simply put, we as correctional professionals don't open too easily to our families, and this is a great opportunity to share with them what our career entails. When conducting the class, I'm in awe at the number of questions received and how interested participants are. Coming from me as an instructor, the material removes a degree of fear and threat our loved ones may be

experiencing, and doing that is an absolutely fulfilling opportunity for me. I can't describe the amount of joy it brings me to be able to inform the families and see the degree of interest they have in this material! WOW, just WOW! I'm so lucky to be able to do this and maybe help save a correctional professional's career or family! I love what I do!

After class we reflect with one another, and to see the material radiating out of them, hear them talk about it and be open and share is incredibly rewarding. I'm the lucky one—I just gained a friend and connection at another facility, someone I can trust and communicate with when the next "big event" happens.

This role is 100% satisfying, as interacting with my coworkers on this level is something that career dreams are made of. The immense joy I experience from truly helping and sharing knowledge with my extended work family, and maybe saving a career, a marriage, or even a life is immeasurable! This! This right here is why CF2F and Desert Waters Correctional Outreach changed my life for the better by giving deeper meaning to my career. Every day that I get to be involved with staff wellness/CF2F is a day for personal improvement and learning. In my book, that's a day not worked, but spent with friends and family. They say if you enjoy what you do for a living, you'll never work a day in your life; and this has been my experience with CF2F and staff wellness. Every day I am living the life—being present, educating, taking care of each other, and moving forward to grow our team. This role does not involve any competition because the goal is for everyone to succeed!

These skills are also applied in the civilian world, with real people struggling, including my friends, family, and strangers who just want to vent and are seeing the world a little foggy. I help clear the mist for them to see what is important, real, and what we can control and what we cannot control. I help them gain awareness of where they are focusing their attention, so they can ask themselves if it is where it needs to be.

CF2F is the real deal. It has given me purpose and excitement for the days to come, and the discipline to use the ABCs of self-care taught in the course. I share this with everyone I can. We are all in this together. We get one chance, one life, so why not make it your best? I AM.



# FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILLMENT™

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

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# NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS IN CORRECTIONS: FINDING LIGHT IN DARK PLACES

BY AN ANONYMOUS CORRECTIONAL WORKER


The holidays are often thought of as a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness—a season that beckons warmth and family. But for those of us working in corrections, this time of year often brings a complicated mix of emotions, not only for the people inside, but also for those of us tasked with keeping the wheels turning. Walking into a correctional facility during the holiday season, there is a heavy feeling that seems to settle in the moment you step through the doors, separating two distinct worlds—one filled with the festivities of the season and another characterized by isolation and routine.

I remember vividly the emotional whiplash of the holidays. Outside, the world was humming with holiday lights, children’s programs, shopping, and gatherings. Inside the prison walls, however, it was just another day. Lines ran as usual. Chow was served. Yard and regular programming continued on schedule. There was no pause, no festivity, no extra sense of goodwill—just the same routines that mark every other day of the year. And yet, the two worlds collided for me every evening, as I left the sterile walls behind only to face the bright lights and celebrations outside.

The transition wasn’t easy. I would finish my shift and find myself at family gatherings, holiday parties, or shopping malls, surrounded by the trappings of the season but unable to fully engage. The dark weight of the facility seemed to cling to me, an invisible barrier that separated me from the merriment around me. While well-meaning holiday parties at the facility were a gesture of appreciation for staff, they couldn’t quite lift the shadow that lingered over the place I worked, the knowledge that so many people spent this time cut off from the comforts of family and tradition.

Working in corrections during the holidays is a reminder of the contrast between freedom and confinement, connection and separation. It’s a time of year that underscores peace and goodwill, yet within the walls of a prison, life continues as it always does, untouched by the seasonal spirit. Even as the rest of the world pauses to celebrate, the elements that make prison “prison” don’t relent. They don’t care if it’s Christmas Eve or New Year’s Day. The weight of the institution is always there, reminding us that isolation is a constant for those on the inside—and sometimes for those of us on the outside, too.

There were moments, though, that broke through the darkness, flashes of light in the gloom. I remember seeing children and families who came to visit their loved ones during this season, and although we were taught not to let feelings get in the way, I often found myself deeply affected by these visits. Seeing a mother I knew from my large church visiting her daughter, catching the embarrassed look in her eyes when



she saw me, I felt the shared humanity of it all. This mother wasn't just another visitor; she was someone I knew, carrying the burden of a loved one on the inside. For these families, the holidays held a different meaning, one colored by visits and fleeting moments of connection in a place where hope can be hard to find.

Amidst the routine, there were small gestures that brought a sense of holiday spirit—a paper Christmas tree taped to an office wall, staff gathering for appreciation meals, homemade cookies passed around by co-workers. These moments, though modest, made it feel like more than just another day and reminded me that even in darkness, there is room for light.

It's hard enough to separate the corrections world from personal life on an average day, but during the holidays the struggle to switch between these two worlds is even greater. I learned to give myself extra grace, to acknowledge that it's okay to feel worn down by the weight of it all. For those of us in corrections, finding people who can help bridge the gap between these two worlds is essential. Sometimes it's a friend who brings the Christmas party to you when stepping out feels like an insurmountable task, or a loved one who understands that the weight of the job doesn't disappear just because you are home.

The holidays can be tough in corrections, but they also present an opportunity to be a light for others. Smile at the child visiting a parent, share a laugh with a co-worker over Christmas cookies, or let a weary mother from the visiting room know she's seen and understood. **While we may be caught between two worlds, we can create moments of light in the darkness.** And maybe, just maybe, those small acts of kindness are the true spirit of the season.

# ONLINE COUPLES' TRAINING FOR CORRECTIONAL STAFF & FAMILIES

Are you and your partner navigating the unique challenges of life in the correctional profession? Join us for a groundbreaking **2-day online training** designed specifically for correctional couples—staff members and their adult family members. This training is based on Desert Waters' well-regarded courses, **Correctional Family Wellness—For Staff™ (CFW-S)** and **Correctional Family Wellness—For Adult Family Members™ (CFW-F)**. The training is crafted to describe the possible impact of corrections work on relationships, and present possible ways that couples can enhance their interactions, with the ultimate goal over time being relational resilience.

## What to Expect:

- **Day 1:** Two separate tracks—one for the correctional staff member and one for the adult family member—each tailored to address the unique needs and experiences of each role.
- **Day 2:** A collaborative roundtable discussion, where we'll explore the material in depth, share insights, and answer your questions in an interactive Q&A session.

## When:

This training will take place during **National Correctional Family Appreciation Week** in the first week of June—an ideal time to invest in your relationship and well-being.

## Limited Space:

Only **16 couples** will be able to attend, ensuring personalized attention and meaningful engagement.

## Fee:

\$240 per couple for the entire 2-day training.

This is a unique opportunity to gain practical tools and

strategies for enhancing your relationship while navigating the stresses of working in corrections. Don't miss out—reserve your spot today!

**Dates & Times:** June 2025 (specific dates and times will be confirmed)

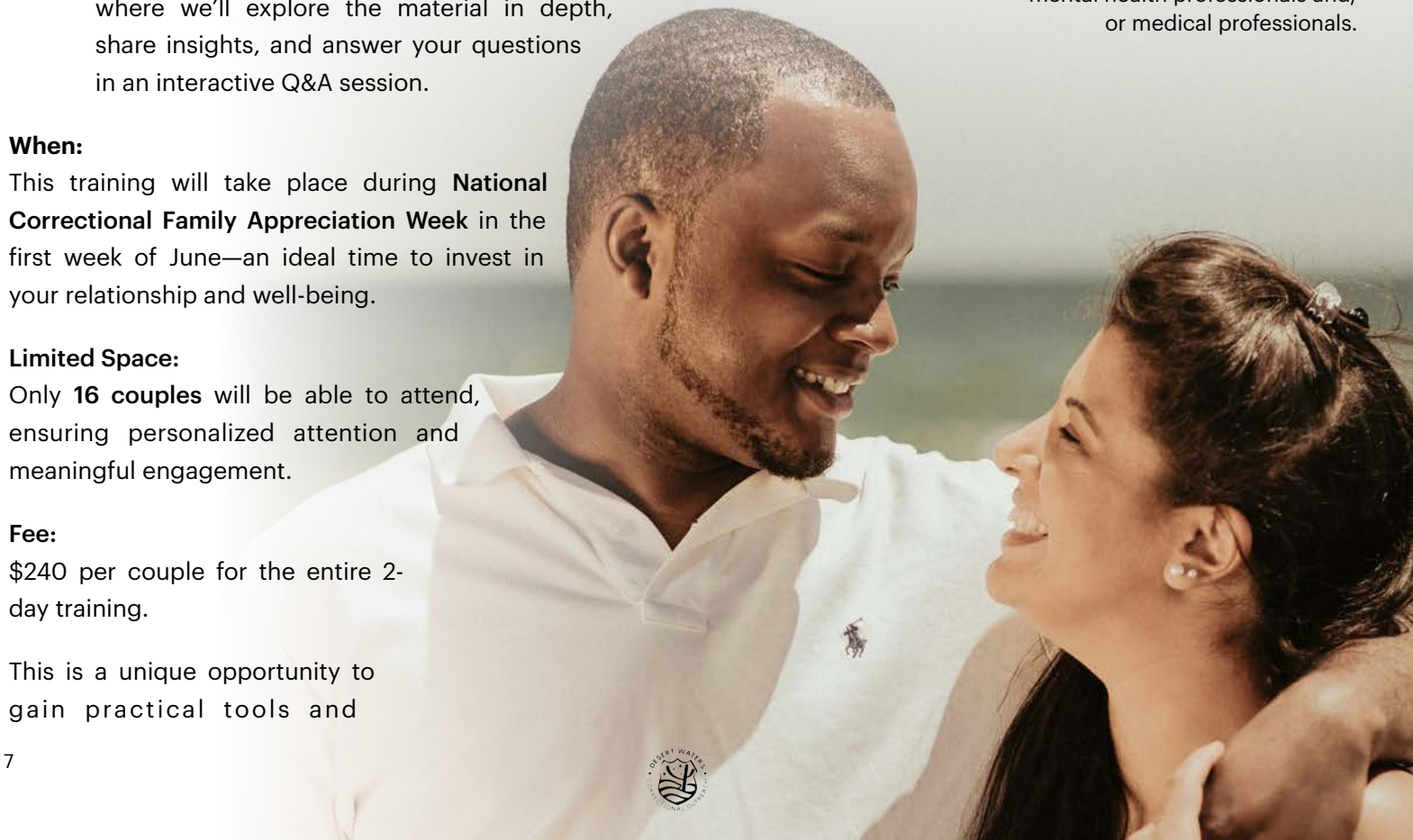
**Location:** Online (from the comfort of your home)

*Sign up now to secure your place for this one-of-a-kind training event!*

And contact us to let us know if you're interested in this training!

<https://desertwaters.com/contact/>

**Note:** This training is not couples' counseling or psychotherapy, and it is not designed or intended to replace seeking professional help from mental health professionals and/or medical professionals.





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## Instructor Candidate Comment

*"Useful for myself but will be very useful for new hires to try to prevent Fatigue,  
or if it does happen, some ways to bounce back from it." Corr. Sgt.*



# WEAVING POSITIVE MEANING

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PH.D., LPC

**W**ellness is not just about physical health or the absence of disease or psychological disorder. Wellness also involves having a sense of purpose and deriving positive meaning from actions that reflect healthy values. In this sense, wellness is truly about “living the dream!” The ultimate result of experiencing purpose and positive meaning in our lives is fulfillment—feeling satisfied, content, blessed, or, for lack of a better term, spiritually “rich.”

This sense of meaning is the fuel that keeps us going, giving life flavor and richness. It helps us get out of bed each morning with “pep in our step” and a positive vision to move toward—even if that vision is small. Meaning guides how we spend our waking hours and the goals we pursue. That’s why meaning has such a critical impact on our quality of life—and even our health. The way we invest our time and the goals we set shape both our well-being and our destiny.

For many reasons (and I’m sure you can name a few!), working in corrections can challenge staff’s search for meaning. This is especially true for those in custody/security roles, where a “good day” may be narrowly defined as: “We all made it home in one piece, and in relatively the same shape as we arrived.” In such roles, where the focus is often on preventing something negative from happening, finding meaning requires extra effort—it’s hard to celebrate the absence of something.

Creating positive meaning in corrections—and holding on to it day after day, year after year, despite little evidence that staff’s efforts are making a significant or lasting impact—is nothing less than noble and heroic. It requires learning to see with fresh eyes, and sometimes it involves relentlessly searching for gold nuggets in torrents of mud. For they are there, waiting to be found.

Over the past 25 years, I’ve witnessed corrections staff thrive when they learn to infuse even routine or menial work with positive significance. These individuals learn to not take themselves too seriously, to not fall in love with their image or power, or be overly concerned with others’ opinions. Instead, they focus on doing their job to the best of their ability, sometimes minute by minute.

So, how can you create positive meaning for yourself? Here are some suggestions.

- Train your mind to look for the positive aspects of just about everything.
- Remind yourself that if nothing else, a mistake is a learning opportunity.
- Look for the beauty in the gift of every moment.
- Tap into what inspires you to be the best you can be.
- Remember the loved ones you are providing for by doing this work.
- Actively contribute to any degree—no matter how small it may seem to you—to the welfare of others.

- Pursue acts of courage, civility, and integrity—take the high road.
- Note and celebrate progress in yourself and others—both staff and the population you manage, and again, no matter how small it may seem to you.
- Model behaviors you want to see in others, remember that every interaction with either staff or justice-involved persons is a training opportunity that can influence others' conduct.
- Seek to learn from others that you respect.
- Seek honest feedback from colleagues with whom you interact frequently.
- Highlight success stories, and share them with others.
- Point out to others the skillfulness required of corrections professionals of all disciplines to do a good job. During the course of their workday, corrections professionals may employ skills related to psychology, social work, public health, education, cheerleading, motivational interviewing, mentoring, spiritual encouragement, law enforcement, and warfare.
- Choose to let go of grudges, and learn how to do so, because acts of forgiveness are closely linked to emotional well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

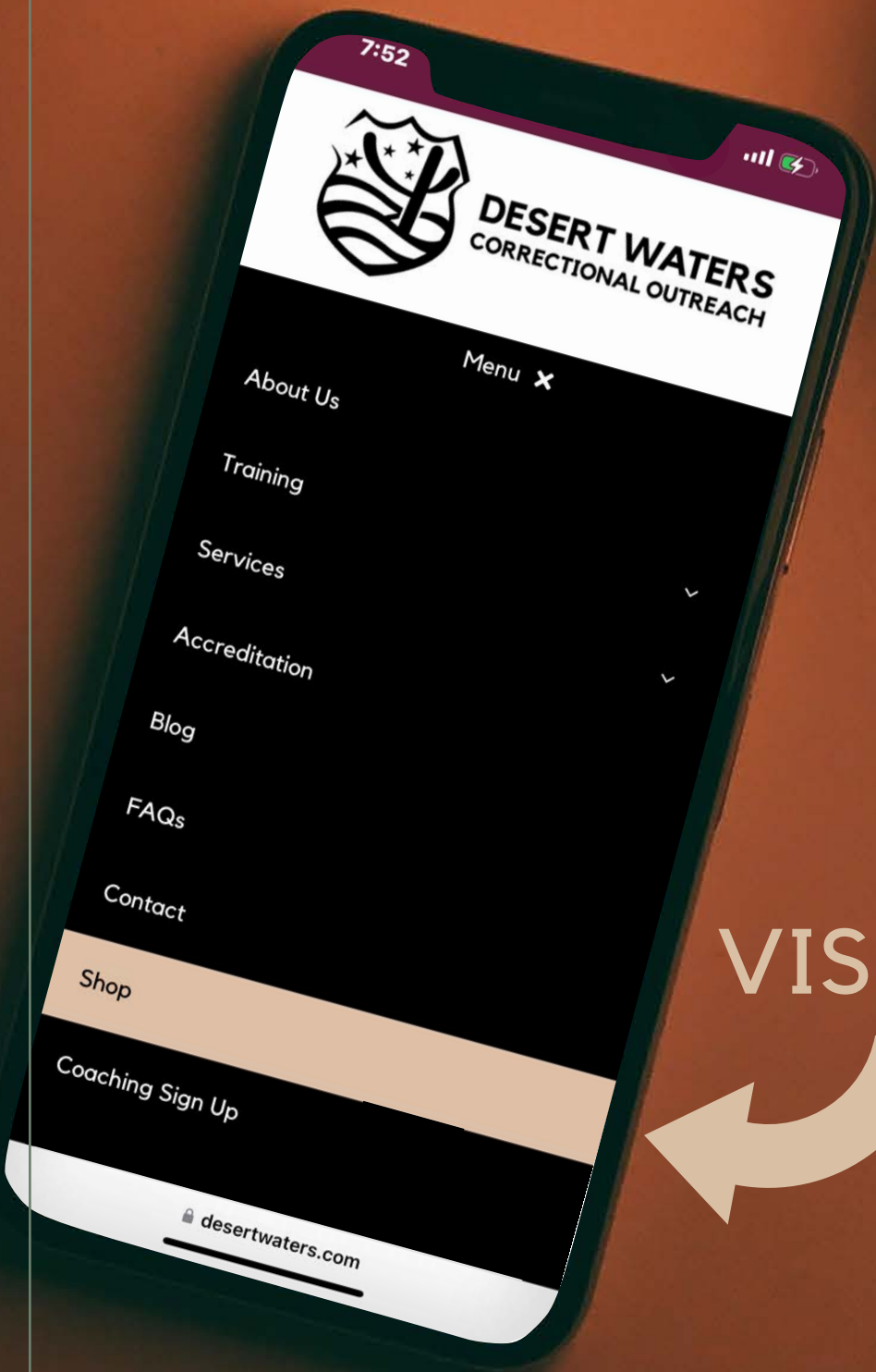
During times when finding meaning in your corrections work seems hard to do, remind yourself that:

- When you face your fears and stand your ground by doing the right thing, you are being courageous.
- When you persevere in the pursuit of your values-driven goals in spite of disappointments, you show grit and gumption.
- When you exercise self-control in the face of provocation, you show your maturity and wisdom.
- When you support colleagues and help them do a better job, you show you are an asset to your profession.
- When you choose to mentor others, you contribute to the creation of a positive workplace culture.
- When you identify the silver lining in the cloud, you remain optimistic and in control of your attitude and your responses.
- When you choose to continue to do good and take the high road after you encounter injustice, you show your inner strength.
- When you choose to forgive, you show your nobility of character and you maintain your dignity.

So, to continue seeking meaning, ask yourself:

1. What do I want to accomplish through my life, including my family life and my corrections employment?
2. What do I want to be my predominant mood and attitude, the mood and attitude I am best known by?

3. How can I impact people positively in my family and at my workplace?
4. How can I create positive ripple effects in my community through my actions?
5. How might my work have a positive impact on others, even for generations to come?
6. How can I best respond when I accomplish something that to me is significant and noteworthy, yet nobody commends me for it or nobody even notices?
7. How do I “bounce back” from disappointment and bitterness when confronted with what to me seems to be injustice towards me or others?
8. How can I “refuel”—go from becoming discouraged to being encouraged again?
9. How do I move past other staff’s failures, so I can continue to live according to my values?
10. How do I move past my own failures, so I can continue to live according to my values?
11. What do I need to be pursuing intentionally today to feel like I am fully alive?
12. At the end of the road in this life, what would I think was a life worth living?



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## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

With all the things  
I've been through,  
the No. 1 thing that  
I've learned is that  
we're supposed to  
help people through  
this world.

Ray Lewis



# IN MEMORIAM

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Corrections Officer  
Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center  
New Mexico

**Arthur Scena IV**

Correctional Officer & Police Officer  
Montgomery County Prison Philadelphia Housing  
Authority & Chester City Police Department  
Pennsylvania

# MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



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## Mission

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

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## Support Desert Waters Correctional Outreach

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being of corrections staff and other public safety professionals, and to also assist their families. Contributions by individuals like you enable us to offer some services at no cost, and to keep our products affordable for agencies. Consider joining us in our mission by making a tax-deductible **donation** today. Thank you for your support!

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional and other public safety agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

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