

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 22

IN THIS ISSUE:

- From The Director's Desk
- Holiday Medley
- Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office Reports Measurable Benefits from Innovative 4/8/40 Pilot
- Lives on the Line
- When Strength Becomes a Trap: How Correctional Culture Can Fuel Officer Suicide
- Band-Aids of Armor
- Peer Support Perspectives
- The Man Next Door
- The Eight Dimensions of Wellness
- In Memoriam
- Quotes of the Month

A Desert Waters Publication



DESERTWATERS.COM

DECEMBER 2025



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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Greetings to you all!

As the holiday season arrives, we wish you a safe and meaningful time—whether you are celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, the New Year, or simply the season itself—or none of the above.

May we all cherish moments with those we hold dear, and make the most of our time together—investing our energy in pursuits that truly matter and leave a lasting positive impact. Even if you don't always realize it, you have influence. Use it wisely.

Caterina Spinaris

*"Time is the one gift we can't return
so give it to what matters most."*

Holiday Medley

By Susan Jones, PhD

Tis the Season....

As we approach the holiday season I encourage you to look around for an opportunity to reach out a hand to help others. During this time of year, it is easy to see the needs in our community.

Over the river and through the woods....

With the holidays many of us will be traveling either across the state or across the nation. This can be an exciting time of year, but it can also be a dangerous time of year. Be sure to slow down and watch out for others.

Won't you lead my sleigh tonight....

Make it a goal this year to be someone's "answer" to their problems. Even if you feel like your talents have not been appreciated, reach out, take a risk.

Bearing gifts, we've travelled afar....

Don't get so bogged down in overbuying. This season should not be a time where we go into debt to provide our loved ones with everything they want. Think of other ways to provide "gifts." Sometimes we overlook the gift of our time. Just spending time with people that matter to you can be better than any material possessions.

Laughing all the way....

No matter what your spiritual beliefs are, don't forget "joy." If we get to January 2nd and have not taken time to smile or laugh, it has been nothing but a time to push through. Work to make sure this is not what happens to you.

Above all... We wish you a merry.....



Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office Reports

Measurable Benefits from Innovative 4/8/40 Pilot

Positive news about morale and retention in the law enforcement field is rare. Yet, that's exactly what the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office in New Mexico reported in a recent media release announcing the successful completion of its six-month pilot of the **"4/8/40 Work Well Live Well"** schedule, launched on October 5, 2024.

The innovative model—four 8-hour shifts totaling 40 hours per week—was offered to patrol deputies as an opt-in/opt-out option. What made this pilot truly groundbreaking was that participating deputies received up to two hours of administrative leave per shift dedicated to physical and mental wellness activities. Performance and productivity data were tracked and compared to corresponding periods in 2023 and 2024.

Results from the October 2024–April 2025 pilot were striking:

- Overtime hours **decreased** by **53%**.
- Vacancy rates **dropped** dramatically—from **24%** in August 2024 to **3%**.
- Average **satisfaction** scores among opt-in deputies reached **8.88/10**, peaking at **9.27/10** in March 2025.
- Deputy-initiated calls for service **rose** by **69%**.
- Traffic citations **grew** by **84%**.
- Traffic stops **increased** by **94%**.
- Motor vehicle crashes **declined** by **20%**, attributed to heightened enforcement activity.
- Response times for both Priority Level 1 and overall calls steadily **improved**.

The 4/8/40 schedule replaced traditional 12-hour shifts—which often stretched to 15 hours—with a healthier, more sustainable structure that emphasizes rest, family time, and personal wellness. Deputies reported improved work-life balance, reduced fatigue, and greater job satisfaction, alongside measurable gains in operational performance. This represents a clear, resounding win-win for both staff and the Sheriff's Office.

Encouraged by these results, Sheriff Adan Mendoza and County Manager Gregory S. Shaffer have agreed to extend the 4/8/40 schedule for another six months. During this extension, the Sheriff's Office announced that performance metrics will continue to be evaluated and deputies' feedback gathered before deciding on permanent implementation of this schedule.

Deputies reported improved work-life balance, reduced fatigue, and greater job satisfaction, alongside measurable gains in operational performance.





FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILLMENT™

Online Instructor Training

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

**March 10-13 & 16-18,
October 20-23 &
26-28, 2026**

Seven 4.5 hour days

LEARN MORE



Click or scan the
code to register.

\$1,795 per Instructor Candidate

Lives on the Line

A Series on Correctional Staff Suicide Risk and Paths to Prevention

At Desert Waters, the issue of correctional staff suicide remains at the forefront of our minds. We continue to receive messages from across the country about staff who have died by suicide. We cannot simply read the news and move on. A concerted, proactive effort is needed—one that goes far beyond a one-hour training on recognizing the signs of suicidal thinking.

With this article, we begin a series examining the complex and interrelated factors that increase correctional staff's risk for suicide—and exploring what can be done to reduce that risk and strengthen protective factors.

This series has several goals:

1

To address the multifaceted causes of correctional staff suicide.

2

To examine the interplay between individual vulnerabilities and occupational stressors.

3

To challenge stigma surrounding mental health struggles and seeking support.

4

To promote systemic change by fostering healthier, more supportive workplace cultures—with policies and resources that protect and sustain staff well-being.

5

To advance prevention strategies that strengthen constructive coping skills and resilience.

When Strength Becomes a Trap: How Correctional Culture Can Fuel Officer Suicide

2025 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC

Summary

This article explores how culturally reinforced hypermasculinity—characterized by adherence to traditional masculine norms—may contribute to the elevated suicide rates observed among male correctional officers. It also considers how such norms can affect women in the corrections workforce.

A study of the Massachusetts Department of Correction reported that between 2010 and 2015, correctional officers died by suicide at a rate of roughly 105 per 100,000—about seven times the national suicide rate for U.S. adults (Frost, 2020). Additional research finds that the risk of death by suicide among correctional officers is approximately 39–41% higher than in the general working-age population (Stack & Tsoudis, 1997; Violanti, 2017).

Understanding Correctional Officers' Suicide Rates and Risk

A colleague recently asked a question that has stayed with me: Beyond the well-documented stresses of the job, **is there a pre-existing tendency among those who choose corrections that makes them especially vulnerable to suicide?**

This seemingly simple question highlights a tension often observed in corrections: the personal characteristics—particularly strengths—that draw individuals to the profession can interact with occupational culture in ways that gradually erode resilience.



Note: The term **suicide rate** refers to the number of actual confirmed suicides, while **suicide risk** refers to the probability or likelihood of death by suicide for a given population.

Individual and Cultural Factors

This article focuses primarily on male correctional officers, as most studies either report male-specific data or do not specify the gender of decedents. In the general population, men die by suicide three to four times more often than women (National Center for Health Statistics, 2024), a pattern that extends to police officers (Violanti et al, 2018).



Men who enter corrections may be drawn to the profession because they identify with traditional masculine norms, which are perceived as aligned with the demands of the job.

These traits include:

- **Emotional restriction:** Reluctance or difficulty expressing emotions other than anger.
- **Self-reliance:** Reluctance to seek help, limiting social support.
- **Risk-taking:** Comfort with or attraction to high-risk situations.

These traits are strongly associated with increased suicide risk. Men who score highly on these characteristics have more than twice the lifetime risk of dying by suicide compared to those who do not (Coleman et al., 2020), and more than twice the risk of a lifetime suicide attempt (Eggenberger et al. 2024). They also tend to express distress physically (e.g., headaches, fatigue), externalize emotions through anger or aggression, and hold beliefs that emotional pain is unbearable (Eggenberger et al., 2024).

However, personality and cultural factors alone cannot account for the high suicide risk among correctional officers. In one study, male police officers, who similarly conform to traditional masculine norms, had less than half the suicide rate observed in correctional officers (New Jersey Police Suicide Task Force Report, 2009). Additionally, correctional officers experience higher rates of PTSD than police officers (Jaegers et al., 2019).



Sort by Date

50 Products

VISIT OUR SHOP

Books

Posters

Workbooks

Merchandise

and more!

SHOP NOW!



www.desertwaters.com

Individual and Cultural Factors Continued

I propose that a major contributor to elevated suicide rates of correctional officers is not pre-existing vulnerability, but the strong adoption of the prevailing correctional culture's norms. **This culture of toughness reinforces emotional restriction, extreme self-reliance, risk-taking, and externalized anger**—factors that heighten psychological strain and erode mental health and resilience. Over time, officers who internalize these norms may become increasingly at risk for suicide when under significant emotional strain.

The Role of Occupational Culture

Correctional officers may not enter the profession with strongly internalized traditional masculinity values. Yet, U.S. corrections culture and working conditions often demand adherence to these norms.

During emergencies or high-stress situations, it is vital not to be overcome by emotion. Officers must remain focused and task-oriented—lives may depend on it. Many supervise large groups alone, requiring self-reliance, decisiveness, and comfort with risk. In this context, traditional masculine traits can be adaptive, even lifesaving.

The problem arises when these traits become the default response, applied indiscriminately to all situations, including those requiring reflection, emotional processing, and human connection. There is a time to “keep it together” and a time to process experiences and their impact.

Many corrections cultures elevate hypermasculinity, perhaps as a misguided strategy to enhance safety. **New officers are often conditioned—through peer pressure and role modeling—to suppress emotions (except anger), avoid seeking help, and treat risk-taking as a badge of toughness.** These norms stigmatize emotional expression and enforce a “code of silence” regarding emotional distress. As one officer joked about his institution's Emergency Response Team: “They hose the decks down with testosterone.” This shaping influence may be less pronounced among police officers, who typically are not confined inside a facility for most of their shifts.

Women in Corrections: Navigating a Masculine Culture

These dynamics are not limited to men. Women correctional officers may also feel pressure to adopt traditionally masculine traits to avoid ridicule, exclusion, or dismissal, and to earn the respect of male peers by demonstrating they can meet the demands of the job.

In this context, women's assimilation into a traditional masculine culture can become a strategy for acceptance and credibility—a perceived requirement for belonging within the “Brotherhood” (Murphy et al, 2004). These observations underscore the need for future research to determine whether women correctional officers experience higher suicide rates than women police officers or women in the general population, clarifying gender-specific suicide risks within corrections. In fact, although the sample was small, the only study identified on this topic reported that the age-adjusted suicide risk for women correctional personnel was nearly twice that of U.S. women in the general workforce (Violanti, 2017).

Toward Systemic Healing

Meaningful suicide prevention requires confronting hypermasculinity as the default ideal in all situations. Efforts must extend beyond individual strategies to address organizational, cultural, and policy dimensions.

Systemic change should prioritize:

- Leadership development that dismantles stigmatizing norms, promotes psychological safety, and reframes vulnerability as courage.
- Accessible, properly trained peer support services.
- Evidence-based, trauma-responsive training to strengthen constructive coping and emotional processing.
- Confidential mental health resources and compassionate postvention following any known suicide or attempt.
- Organizational health initiatives addressing Emotional Intelligence (EQ), distress tolerance, supervisory support, and quarterly voluntary confidential mental health check-ins.

A comprehensive approach—integrating top-down (organizational), bottom-up (individual), and lateral (coworker-to-coworker) interventions, while also considering family life—offers the most promising path forward.

References

1. Coleman, D., Feigelman, W., & Rosen, Z. (2020). Association of High Traditional Masculinity and Risk of Suicide Death: Secondary Analysis of the Add Health Study. *JAMA psychiatry*, 77(4), 435–437.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.4702>
2. Eggenberger, L., Spangenberg, L., Genuchi, M.C., & Wlther, A. (2024.) Men's suicidal thoughts and behaviors and conformity to masculine norms. A person-centered, latent profile approach. *Heliyon*, Volume 10, Issue 20, doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39094
3. Frost, N. A. (2020). Understanding the impacts of corrections officer suicide (NCJ 254473). National Institute of Justice. U.S. Department of Justice.
<https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/understanding-impacts-corrections-officer-suicide>
4. Jaegers, Lisa A. PhD; Matthieu, Monica M. PhD; Vaughn, Michael G. PhD; Werth, Paul MS; Katz, Ian M. MS; Ahmad, Syed Omar PhD. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Job Burnout Among Jail Officers. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 61(6):p 505-510, June 2019. | DOI: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000001600
5. Murphy, D.S., terry, C.M., Newbold, C., & Richards, S.C. (2004). Women Guarding Men. https://www.cjci.org/media/import/documents/women_guarding.pdf
6. National Center for Health Statistics. (2024). Suicide Mortality in the United States, 2002–2022 (NCHS Data Brief No. 509). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
7. New Jersey Police Suicide Task Force Report. (2009).
[http://www.state.nj.us/lps/library/NJPoliceSuicideTaskForceReport-January-30-2009-Final\(r2.3.09\).pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/lps/library/NJPoliceSuicideTaskForceReport-January-30-2009-Final(r2.3.09).pdf)
8. Stack, S., & Tsoudis, O. (1997). Suicide risk among correctional officers: A logistic regression analysis. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 3(3), 183–186.
9. Violanti, J. M. (2017). Suicide behind the wall: A national analysis of corrections officer suicide. *Suicidology Online*, 8, 138–144.
10. Violanti, J. M., Charles, L. E., Hartley, T. A., Mnatsakanova, A., Fekedulegn, D., & Burchfiel, C. M. (2018). Police stressors and health: A stateoftheart review. *Policing: An International Journal*, 41(4), 642–656. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-03-2018-0048PMC>

Connect with Us!



Stay connected with Desert Waters Correctional Outreach as we work to strengthen the well-being of correctional and other public safety professionals and their families.

- **Follow us** for stories, research, and training opportunities.
- **Explore** our blog filled with articles.
- **Reach out**—we'd love to hear from you!



Band-Aids of Armor

By an Anonymous Correctional Lieutenant

We recently published this article, but are sharing this article again because it clearly shows how hypermasculinity traits are learned over time—and why understanding this matters. Emphasis added.

Staff **learns to apply a thin layer of “Machismo”** as a result of each incident they experience. It's like a Band-Aid. But this type of Band-Aid doesn't protect the wound from infection or aid in the healing process. Instead it covers and seals in your emotions and your feelings; otherwise you're “weak”, a “punk”, or a “sissy”. Because we all know, “Maximum security staff are the real gladiators, and we run these inmates.”

After a while and numerous incidents, you have so many Band-Aids on you that inmates can't penetrate them and get to you or your “old” heart. The only problem is the Band-Aids don't come off after work. They stay on. So you live your life and miss all the beauty and the real experiences because you are a heartless, emotionally numb, and desensitized a---.

You see an awful car accident with injuries, big deal. You have a friend that gets hurt really bad, big deal. Your family member dies in his fifties and you truly love the man, big deal. An inmate gets stabbed 47 times, big deal. You get mad because your kid wrecks his bike and cries because he skinned up his knees, big deal. Tell him to man-up and quit being a baby and walk away.

Then, if you are blessed, your friends and family or maybe a co-worker persuade you to go to a counselor and they begin the long process of removing your Band-Aids. Then slowly over time you realize, “S- - -. I hollered at my kid because he wrecked his bike and hurt his knees. He is only 10.

I should have picked him up and carried him inside, babied him a bit and taken care of him. Let him know I am here for him and can take care of him. But, that's not the gladiator way!

I have to be tough because I have several years in corrections and 500+ Band-Aids of armor to show what a tough guy I am. How frustrating! I can't wait for the rewarding part, when I can look in the mirror and feel like a normal human being.



Peer Support Perspectives

We're excited to introduce a new regular column in the Correctional Oasis—**Peer Support Perspectives!** This space is dedicated to addressing the real-world challenges, questions, and situations that arise within peer support programs across public safety organizations. Each month, we'll offer practical guidance and insights to help strengthen your agency's peer support efforts and promote the well-being of those who serve.

We invite you to submit your questions or scenarios to admin@desertwaters.com. Every submission will remain completely anonymous, with all identifying details removed before publication.

Let's learn from one another's experiences and work together to build the strongest, most effective peer support teams possible!

Share
your
Story

Peer Support Perspectives

Beyond Critical Incidents: Expanding the Reach of Peer Support

2025 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC

It is not uncommon for peer support teams (PSTs) to be trained and deployed solely to assist staff affected by critical incidents. These are typically defined as incidents involving violence, injury, or death (VID)—whether the death occurred from natural or unnatural causes. In essence, the term refers to highly stressful, life-threatening, and potentially psychologically traumatizing events. However, limiting peer support to critical incidents only has several important drawbacks.

1. **Limited reach.** Usually, only staff who were physically present during the incident are approached by the PST.
2. **Inconsistent definitions.** Different agencies may define “critical incidents” in varying ways. As a result, some VIDs may trigger a peer support response while others do not—even though the excluded events may also be deeply traumatizing.
3. **Unrecognized secondary impact.** Staff who were not physically present may still be profoundly affected. Examples include:
 - Employees whose friends were assaulted, even if they work at another facility.
 - Those triggered because the event reminds them of a prior incident.
 - Individuals who unjustifiably experience guilt or shame for not being on site to help colleagues.
 - Staff who overheard the event on the radio or watched it unfold on video.
4. **Other sources of distress.** Critical incidents are not the only events that can harm staff wellness, functioning, and performance—and, in turn, impact the agency’s mission. For every critical incident, there may be numerous other professional or personal stressors that take a toll. Examples include workplace conflict, moral injury, personal or family health issues, financial strain, addiction, general Corrections Fatigue, or traumatic experiences outside of work.

For these reasons, Desert Waters’ [Peer Supporter Training™](#) prepares peer supporters to assist colleagues who are struggling not only after critical incidents, but also with any personal or professional challenges that threaten their well-being.

The Man Next Door

By The Old Screw

The man next door is a strange one. On the outside he appears to be the same as you and me, but there are signs that he is different from you and me. He's quiet. And he never stops scanning his surroundings. When you talk to him, he never looks into your eyes for long. He is always looking around. Whenever possible, he stands with his back against a wall.

I wonder about this man with the guarded look in his eyes and a sadness that I hope and pray is never in mine. We went out to eat one time and he was almost rude in making sure he sat where his back was to a wall and he could see all entryways.

As I grew to know and understand this man, I couldn't help but think, but he seems so nice? He was so gentle with little children and animals. With grown-ups, he was sometimes short, harsh.

And then one day I found out why this man was the way he was. He was the first Prison Officer I had ever met.

He told me some little things about his work, and I thought, my God how can he go into that place every day and do his job? How can anyone do a job like that? He told me that even women work in there and work around killers and rapists every day. How can they do that and remain human?

I knew then that **I had met a real person**, not some fake that brags about having a dangerous job, but one that did his job with no fanfare or glory. And it made me proud that I could call a Corrections Officer my friend.

Take care,

The Old Screw

The Eight Dimensions of Wellness

In Desert Waters' holistic Correctional Staff Wellness Accreditation Program, [SafetyNet Accreditation™](#), we draw on the [Eight Dimensions of Wellness](#) identified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) and demonstrate how each dimension is integrated into SafetyNet's 18 standards.

These dimensions are essential for safe and effective functioning, and are interconnected—when one area of wellness is affected, positively or negatively, the others are often influenced as well.

But what exactly are these eight dimensions, and why do they matter for staff wellness?

Wellness is more than just “feeling good.” For correctional and public safety staff, it means:

Being able to perform safely and effectively in high-stress, high-responsibility roles while maintaining physical, mental, social, and work-related well-being.



The Eight Dimensions of Wellness

Here's a brief look at what each of the eight dimensions represents. For a deeper dive, you can find more information [here](#).

1. **Emotional** wellness involves effectively managing stress, coping with challenges constructively, and maintaining relationships that are healthy, supportive, and meaningful.
2. **Environmental** wellness refers to working and living in spaces that are safe, respectful of personal and shared areas, esthetically pleasing, appropriately stimulating, and supportive.
3. **Financial** wellness is the ability to manage resources responsibly in order to feel reasonably secure and satisfied with both current and future financial circumstances.
4. **Intellectual** wellness entails exercising the mind through ongoing learning, creativity, and critical thinking, remaining engaged through curiosity, and continuously growing in knowledge and skills.
5. **Occupational** wellness is finding meaningful purpose and satisfaction in work and volunteer roles while aligning responsibilities with personal values and professional goals.
6. **Physical** wellness involves maintaining health and vitality through regular physical activity, good nutrition, restorative sleep, and preventive care.
7. **Social** wellness is the ability to build and maintain personal relationships that are enjoyable and supportive while cultivating a sense of connection, teamwork, and belonging.
8. **Spiritual** wellness involves understanding, exploring, and living in alignment with core beliefs and values to foster inner peace, a sense of meaning in life, and connection with something larger than oneself.

IN MEMORIAM

Never Forgotten

Imam Abdallah Hadian, Chaplain

New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision

Jeremy Lewis Hall, Corrections Officer

Virginia Department of Corrections

Line of Duty Death

QUOTES

of the month

“There comes a point when we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”

Desmond Tutu



MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



**CATERINA SPINARIS,
PH.D., LPC**
Executive Director

**Content Curation,
Production &
Editing**



**STEPHANIE
RAWLINGS, M.S.**
Deputy Director

**Content
Development &
Editing**



JUDY MYERS, B.S.
Executive Assistant

Content Editing



TANISHA LEE, M.S.
[Tee D. Lee Designs](#)

**Graphic Design
& Layout**

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.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in the Correctional Oasis are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views and opinions held by DWCO Board members, staff, and/or volunteers. DWCO is not responsible for accuracy of statements made by authors. If you have a complaint about something you have read in the Correctional Oasis, please contact us.

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.

*All visuals in this publication are either original works by Tanisha Lee,
sourced from the public domain, or used under license.*