

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 21

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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

*W*elcome to another issue of the Correctional Oasis, which is dedicated to your well-being, and to a better future for the corrections professions and for the public safety professions in general.

The longer we pursue the mission of Desert Waters, the more evident it becomes to us that staff wellness is the most crucial and indispensable ingredient for the success (even the survival) of the profession. What hinges on staff wellness are staff's job performance and professionalism, staff retention, and criminal justice reform.

When work conditions and the workplace culture support wellness, they boost staff's well-being, job performance, and overall functioning at work, at home, and in the community. These successes in turn feed back into the workforce culture, creating positive and energizing workplace environments that promote staff engagement and teamwork. Conversely, when staff wellness is lagging, morale and health (physically, psychologically, and spiritually) decline, feeding back into work conditions and the culture, causing them to deteriorate further. And the feedback loop keeps going.

Our firm conclusion is that without investing in staff wellness comprehensively and proactively, it is impossible to elevate the profession to the point where it becomes a life-giving job and a desirable career. And if the profession does not become a life-giving job and a desirable career, staff retention cannot be significantly improved. In the long run, higher salaries alone will not prove to be enough of a reason to stay. And criminal justice reform risks remaining mostly a dream.

We cheer and come alongside the courageous visionary and supportive leaders who are taking steps towards improving work conditions in preventative and strategic ways, building workforce cultures that sustain staff engagement and staff performance—all of which are essential if we are to attain criminal justice reform.

Caterina Spinaris



KEEPING THE END IN MIND: CONTINUING THE CORRECTIONS

FREE 1-HOUR DISCUSSION WEBINAR

Thursday Aug 22, 2024

12:00 PT | 1:00 MT | 2:00 CT | 3:00 ET

With

Caterina Spinaris, Ph.D., LPC

Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach

Founding Director, Author

William Young

Correctional Professional,

Author, Influencer



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Discussion Points

- What is staff wellness
- This is about ALL OF US
- Challenges along the way
- Progress made
- Sustainability
- Follow up
- What is needed for future success
- One size does not fit all

To view the previous webinars
in this series click the links below.

[BUILDING BLOCKS OF STAFF WELLNESS -
SAFETYNET ACCREDITATION WEBINAR](#)

[REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSTRUCTION
OF SUCCESSFUL WELLNESS PROGRAMS](#)

[MORE REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSTRUCTION
OF SUCCESSFUL WELLNESS PROGRAMS](#)



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ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS—PART 1

BY GREGORY MORTON, M.SC.

Desert Waters recently conducted two webinars reflecting on the construction of correctional staff wellness programs. They are entitled “**Reflections on the Construction of Successful Wellness Programs**” and “**More Reflections on the Construction of Successful Wellness Programs.**” The webinars featured two individuals who built from scratch a still existing program in a large state correctional agency, Mr. Bob Bowen and Ms. Stephanie Rawlings. Both webinar sessions are full of useful suggestions for those responsible for a correctional staff wellness program.

During the second webinar, Ms. Rawlings commented on what she had learned as their program grew. She admitted that she had started with a belief that their program was mainly a suicide prevention initiative. And while that was powerful and essential, she soon came to realize that, “When I think about every correctional issue that has been at the forefront of the industry for the last decade, there can be a case that is made that all roads go back to wellness.” In other words, wellness issues were inherent in every component of the correctional profession, and while single interventions were a key starting point, they often revealed the need for broader and more comprehensive courses of action.

This article series is intended to unpack what that might mean to you as you undertake the building of a staff wellness program, regardless of the size or type of agency you might be a part of, and therefore, to provide some guidance as to how you might proceed. Or to provide some guidance as to how you

might continue your own program growth, if you are already underway and facing the same questions Ms. Rawlings had.

All roads lead to staff wellness. This sounds like a good, even admirable plan. It suggests wellness needs to be considered at every turn. But does it make good policy? And if you think the answer is an automatic “Yes,” then the next question is crucial: Where does it land in the policy ranking? Especially when you consider all the other mandatory things we must do day after day.

Let’s start at the extreme end of the continuum, the potential for deadly force. Back in my maximum-security days, a Lieutenant who worked for me was one of the members of a shotgun squad that successfully rescued a Sergeant who had been taken hostage in a housing unit. Six inmates were shot, none fatally. Afterwards, that Lieutenant, who was our primary security skills trainer for several years and was old-school if anybody ever was, would say, “Don’t ever think it’s easy to shoot another person.”

This is decades before formal peer support programs or post-incident interventions, even before an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). And yet this old-school cowboy (trust me on that one) was spontaneously and openly describing his emotional reactions to the acts he was required to perform during this lifesaving rescue . . . during this legally defensible, formally authorized, administratively planned lifesaving rescue of a co-worker he had known for years.

So, what did our use of force policy say about staff wellness following an actual use of force incident? Another obvious answer. Nothing. He was on his own. There was neither assistance nor recognition from the agency.

And to make things worse, in the years following that incident, when we did our annual policy review to make sure our language continued to be legally defensible and in step with the latest professional best practices (How many hours of training? Pain control, yes or no? Carotid hold, yes or no? Gender differences, yes or no? Mental health inmates, yes or no?), did we ever consider how staff might react to their force applications? Said more directly, did we ever consider adding staff wellness requirements to our Use of Force policy? Did all roads lead to staff wellness for us as we were writing formal agency policy? The regrettable but I'm sure not surprising answer is, "No."

And that is my question to all of you as you build or grow your agency's staff wellness program: How often do you consider staff wellness when you are writing formal agency policy? Not just your Use of Force policy; any formal agency policy?

From where I sit these days, looking back on the mistakes of decades, if you want to agree that all roads lead to staff wellness, then every policy review agenda should include a staff wellness deliberation. Every one. PREA? For sure. Employee/offender boundaries? Oh yeah. Facility maintenance? You might be surprised. Offender visiting? Yep. Community home visits and job visits? Of course. Interacting with the MH population? Absolutely. Your Hospice program? Without a doubt. Your Pre-Sentence Investigation process, your Minimum Custody Work Crews? Like I said, you might be surprised.

And don't stop there. What about your Human Resources policies? Injured worker, Sick Leave, Alcohol and Drug Testing? Think big picture too. Your Code of Ethics, your Media Relations, and your Press Releases policies. You might even start by building staff wellness into your policy on Policy Writing. Then you would be sure that all roads go back to staff wellness.

This is not to say that staff wellness will absolutely need to be included in every policy with no exceptions. But thinking about it as a normal part of every policy deliberation accomplishes several things during your building and growth process.

First, frequent formal discussions of staff wellness cause this subject to be elevated in importance. Is staff wellness as fundamental as your security procedures, which you consider without needing them to be a formal agenda item during policy review? Only you can answer that, but if all roads lead to staff wellness then elevating it to that level of organizational subconsciousness, as a necessity that does not need to be explained (much less defended), is a good measure of your understanding of the needs.

Second, policy authors are influential people in any agency. Often, they are the program administrators or other leaders who guide agency operations. Causing them to discuss and deliberate these issues on an on-going basis is a form of team learning where people begin to see their work and the work of others in new, expanded ways. Corrections people are creative. Ideas build on each other and lead to "aha moments" of sudden insight, like those Ms. Rawlings experienced.

Third, policy and budget interconnect, and policy content is where resource allocation is authorized

and confirmed. Program requirements are established, standards are set, performance outcomes are clarified. And policy-based resource allocation is where top down (administration) and bottom-up (frontline staff) meet. Those “aha moments” become actual wellness interventions for staff by being built into agency policy.

I'll end with this. If I were still the administrator for agency staff training like I was for ten years, when it

came time to edit the Staff Training policy, I would **build in a wellness content requirement for all of our training courses**. Because operations impact staff wellness. If you are going to be authorized to use firearms for deadly force, we're going to write wellness curriculum that you must complete before you are allowed on the range. All roads means ALL roads.

A TALE FROM THE OLE GUARD

BY JUSTIN STEVENS

Printed with permission.

I was 21 when I got into Corrections. I started with the Division of Juvenile Justice. I quickly learned to “fit in.” The prison was like nothing I had ever seen. I learned how to act from my senior staff. I quickly became the alpha male. I quickly immersed myself into the job. I joined the Tactical Team after only 6 months, and I received Officer of the Year my second year on the job. I was “getting it,” and I was really good at what I did.

After “mastering” the Juvenile field, my institution closed. I was transferred to an adult institution. This institution was known for violence. The night before I went to my new prison I cried, because in my mind I was going to die in prison. Thankfully I was wrong, and again I slowly became really good at what I was doing. I promoted to Correctional Sergeant, and quickly got a position on third watch on a Level IV 180 design yard, which was the most secure and most violent general population yard. I knew nothing about what I was doing; however, I had a Lieutenant that mentored me, and I became confident in my job.

If you notice, I told you that I was really good at my job, but I didn’t tell you that during that whole time my personal life was sinking into the abyss. I fell into the prison culture. Lying, cheating, drinking, and energy drinks. I slept a few hours a night and worked doubles. When I wasn't working doubles, I was doing the bad things. They felt right at the time; they went together with prison life like peanut butter and jelly. After all, this worked for those before me, and it was going on with everyone around me. I thought I was a part of the norm. Little did I know this was not, or at least should not be, the norm.

Living on a collision course with reality, I allowed my crazy life to continue into my next promotion, and soon after my worlds came to a crashing halt. My soon-to-be wife met my current (soon to be ex-) wife at the time, who then met my baby momma. How did I let my life get so out of control that this sentence you just read makes sense? I never saw this coming.

Looking back on this time, I don't have one single event that spiraled my life out of control. The cause was a combination of working hard and having no

discipline in my life, seeing trauma daily but not having the ability to talk to anyone. I thought if I drank enough or partied enough, I would eventually succeed in my life. I learned this is the farthest from the truth. I learned quickly that I had to have discipline in my life. I struggled at work and at home for several years.

It was then that I went to CF2F¹ for the first time. I learned that I was struggling with Corrections Fatigue and did not know it. I had negative coping strategies, and I had no support system. Even the prison was lacking in its acceptance of Peer Support or EAP. I learned (and came to believe) that I wanted to get fulfillment out of my work and out of life.

When I finally got my life in order, I was shocked by what I saw about myself. I realized that the mess I had been personally had crept into my professional life without my knowledge. Yet, as I worked on my fulfillment, as I battled Corrections Fatigue, I learned that the better I was as a person, the healthier coping strategies I deployed, and the better my professional life got.

I never promoted again. That didn't mean I was not qualified; in fact, I would tell my former warden right now that I was overly qualified. Instead, having my life under control, I was working on the things I wanted to work on. And what I wanted to work on was the development of my staff, and ensuring the hard work they did on a daily basis was noticed and appreciated. During this time, I also focused on my family. I immersed myself into "real life." I coached my son's baseball team, I volunteered at church. I wanted fulfillment, and I found that the more I was home and intentionally engaged, the happier and freer I was.

I'm writing this to tell you that the journey to fulfillment is not a perfect one. There are landmines, roadblocks and dead ends, but I found out that with self-discipline, fulfillment can be achieved.

¹CF2F is the acronym for Desert Waters' award-winning course "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™." Since its first version was rolled out in 2002 (before Desert Waters Correctional Outreach had come into existence), staff have repeatedly said that the course can be career-saving, marriage-saving, even life-saving. We add that CF2F, properly implemented and reinforced, can be culture-saving. Email us at admin@desertwaters.com for more information.



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Click the links below to learn more:

[Learn more about CF2F](#)

[Link to Playlists](#)

In the prior article “*A Tale From The Ole Guard*” Justin Stevens mentioned Corrections Fatigue and the CF2F course. Here is some more information about this course for those not familiar with it.

CF2F in a Nutshell

- ✓ A scientific and evidence-based explanation of the psychological dynamics behind the negativity of the corrections workplace and its manifold costly consequences to you, your colleagues and your Corrections Agency
- ✓ Data-driven and evidence-informed strategies to increase staff well-being and to improve the organizational climate and culture based on Positive Psychology, psychological trauma, and resilience research
- ✓ FIVE customized versions for staff in adult corrections or detention facilities, probation and parole offices, juvenile facilities, juvenile community services, and for administrators and supervisors
- ✓ Parallel version—F2F—for law enforcement (sheriff’s deputies road patrol and police officers)

CF2F Goals

1. Increase, in a non-judgmental and compassionate manner, participants’ awareness and understanding of the impact of occupational traumatic and other high-stress conditions on staff as individuals, on their home lives, and on the workforce culture. CF2F provides them with a roadmap that helps them grasp in a de-shaming way how they ended up where they find themselves on the day they take the course.
2. Empower staff of all job roles, ranks, and levels to think of ways that they can personally act to improve their own well-being, their coworkers’ well-being, and also the health of their workforce culture.
3. Present *foundational principles* of health-promoting and resilience-promoting behaviors for individuals and for teams, with the aim being to impact workforce cultures positively.

CF2F Objectives

1. Describe the nature and causes of Corrections Fatigue
2. Identify strategies to increase fulfillment as corrections professionals
3. Identify strategies to manage stress associated with corrections work
4. Identify organizational strategies to cultivate a positive organizational climate

The CF2F course received the 2016 Commercial Product of the Year Award of Excellence by the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel.

What Staff Have Said About CF2F

*“Seriously **the most** important training of my career.” J. W.*

“Words fail me. The material is deep, detailed, right on target emotionally, well-organized, clear, effective and much needed. Every single corrections employee I’ve known over the years could make use of this material. There is no telling how many lives, marriages, families and careers could be saved by paying attention to this material.” G. M.

“This training is incredibly valuable. As an employee in corrections, it clearly identifies the struggles inherent to this culture and clearly provides skills to use to mitigate the negative effects.” A. G.

“What CF2F offers you is a space to be you, free from the physical and mental armor that you use to protect all that you are. It gives you a moment in time to come together with other correctional staff to learn you are not alone.” R. M.

“CF2F is an exceptional program that changed my outlook on my career, as well as my personal life. This course assists you in getting to the core of what it is we want from our career, and how to get there in a more uplifting and fulfilling way!!! Do your colleagues, your family and yourself a favor, give CF2F a shot. You won’t regret it!”

M.V





INSTRUCTOR TRAINING



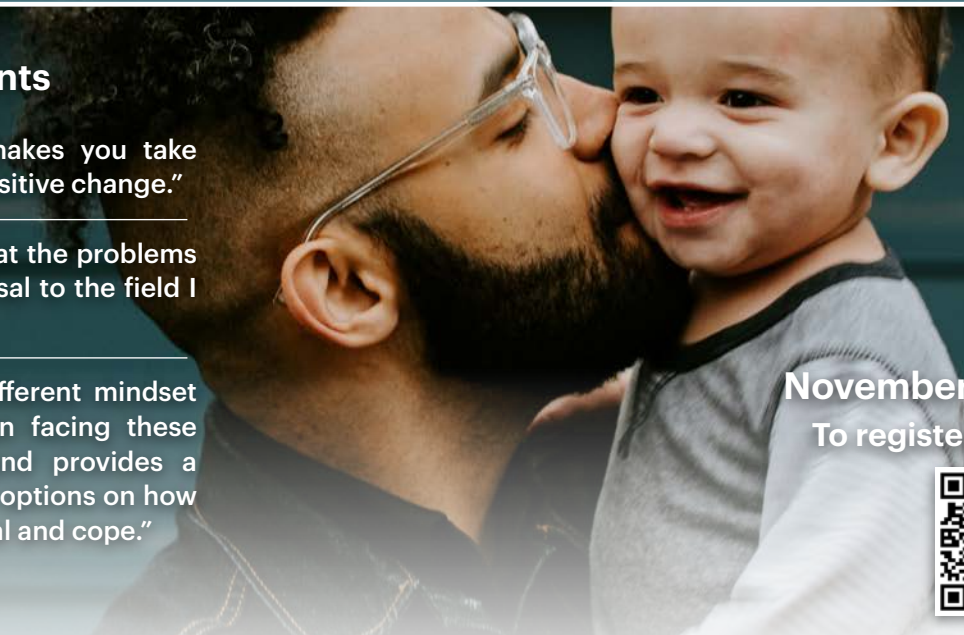
SEND YOUR VETTED STAFF TO GET CERTIFIED TO TEACH THESE COURSES TO COWORKERS AND ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS!

Course Comments

"Informative and makes you take responsibility for positive change."

"To hear and see that the problems I deal with is universal to the field I work in."

"This provides a different mindset and mentality when facing these issues head on, and provides a handful of different options on how to appropriately deal and cope."



November 13-15 & 18-20
To register (scan or click):



Desert Waters' 6-hour proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness - For Staff™" (CFW-S) presents an overview of potential negative impact of correctional work on family members due to: (a) lifestyle changes that affect the family because their loved one works in correctional settings, and (b) negative behavioral changes that staff may undergo as a result of their working in corrections. The course also presents the fundamentals of effective strategies for addressing these challenges, and introduces the basics of positive practices for family care and for emotional closeness.

TARGET AUDIENCE

New and seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) of all disciplines and job roles.

COURSE TOPICS

- When Family Members Enter Our Corrections World
- How Our Families May Be Impacted When Job Requirements Affect Family Life
- Work-to-Home Stressors
- Help for Our Families: Issues and Suggestions
- Helping Our Families Understand Our Negative Changes
- Family Care Practices



Desert Waters' 6-hour proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness - For Families™" (CFW-F) presents information to adult family members about how corrections work realities can impact family life, and provides suggestions for dealing with scenarios commonly experienced by correctional families. This highly interactive course is designed to be offered to adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole), and also to adult family members of new staff. A 2-hour version is available for families of new staff.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Adult family members of new correctional staff and adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) of all disciplines and job roles.

COURSE TOPICS

- Corrections Work Realities
- When Work Comes Home
- What Might My Loved One Face at Work?
- Help for the Family
- The Basics of Self-care
- Family Scenarios



NOT AN ISLAND

BY THE OLD SCREW

There is a saying that no man or woman is an island. It seems though that expectations change when we become Correctional Officers. It's almost like we are supposed to go from one day being "normal," sensitive people to the next being tough, independent, cold, unfeeling. The unspoken expectation is that we must become "macho" persons that never need support and don't need anything to help keep our sanity.

Over the years I have watched people struggle with this switch. Some have managed to cope successfully and some have not. As a result of the "macho" image they carry around, some staff come to believe that it is wrong to seek counseling or to take anything prescribed to help deal with the day-to-day stresses.

Problems can start out with just not feeling right. You find yourself getting unusually grumpy with the spouse and kids. As time goes by you feel less and less about anything or anyone. Is this something you can cure yourself? The answer is, "Not very likely." These changes sometimes wind up costing you your marriage, your job, and, yes, sometimes even your life.

The problem is that you are scared to talk to anyone about how you're feeling. You don't believe your spouse or best friend will understand what you are going through. You don't think you can talk to the brass because you're afraid they will think less of you and look down on you. The same applies to your fellow staff. And you think it will make you less of a person to talk to a mental health provider or to listen

to your doctor who may want to prescribe something that will help keep you less stressed.

There are also stories going around that if you talk to a shrink you won't get out of his or her office before s/he calls your boss. This is not the way things work, but who are you to argue with all the rumors?

Shrinks are not bad people. They will sit you down and tell you what they can and can't do. They will let you talk and talk and talk. There is no criticism about what you tell them. They're just trying to help you understand what is going on with you. Yes, sometimes they will suggest you take something to calm you down. Yes, I have talked to a couple of shrinks and have found on the whole that they can be very helpful. No, I didn't mention it at work and I worked for a number of years afterward.

Some people just have a chemical imbalance and their body needs help. Does this make you a lower-class citizen unfit for the job? I think not. Does taking care of yourself in a healthy way—including using prescribed medications when that is recommended—mean you are a smart person? I believe so!

Sometimes we joke that divorce is a requirement for working in corrections. Only years after corrections work cost me one marriage did I finally start to realize that, **No, I couldn't handle it all by myself.** No, drinking is not the answer, even though I tried that route too after my divorce.

A person may go through their agency's EAP for help or may go through organizations like Desert Waters

to find someone they can trust to reach out to for help. If a person wants to only blow off steam, they can write the Desert Waters' **Ventline**.

Of the many hundreds of staff I have worked with over the years, I have seen very few who could handle the stress and strain on their own. The rest could have used professional mental health help, but sadly didn't seek it. Do I think any less of them

for it? No. But I am sorry that they held back, as it sometimes cost them everything.

Your life matters. And your family deserves to have you happy and healthy. So if you're experiencing the blues, don't be bullheaded. Reach out for help.

TAKE CARE,
The Old Screw



WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH – PART 4

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC AND DARIA MAYOTTE, MA

Can Resilience Be Taught In Ways That Make A Positive Difference?

Given the chronically highly stressful correctional work environments, resilience-promoting skills are a necessity. The critical question is, can such skills be taught to correctional staff in ways that make a difference for the better on various measures of health and functioning? In search of answers to this question, there has been increased research interest in the possibility of teaching resilience in workplaces, to improve the well-being and functioning of employees, especially those working in predictably high-stress or high-trauma environments. Here is a summary of findings.

A meta-analytic review of resilience-building training studies in organizational workplace environments (Vanhove, et al., 2015) examined the effects of resilience-building training on measures of well-being (such as life satisfaction, job satisfaction, optimism), prevention of deficits in psychosocial functioning (such as negative thinking, anxiety, depression), and work performance (such as supervisor-rated performance, successful task completion). Results suggested that indeed resilience skills were acquired, with individual coaching being the most effective method of teaching resilience skills, followed by classroom-based training. Resilience-building training resulted in enhanced training effects that increased over time for workforce populations at greater risk for exposure to highly stressful and/or traumatic work conditions and who had had no prior such training, contrary to workforces not exposed to such conditions. (In the latter case, training benefits diminished over time.) Correctional work environments certainly fall in the category of highly stressful and/or traumatic work environments, and based on these findings, would be expected to benefit from individual or classroom resilience training.

Another study during the COVID-19 pandemic found that teaching healthcare workers resilience-promoting skills improved levels of resilience, stress, anxiety, and burnout-exhaustion (Yi-Frazier, O'Donnell, Adhikari, Zhou, Bradford, Garcia-Perez, Shipman, Hurtado, Junkins, O-Daffer, & Rosenberg, 2022). And yet another study reported that online group coaching of women physician trainees decreased burnout and increased well-being measures (Mann, Shah, Thibodeau, Dyrbye, Syed, Woodward, Thurmon, Jones, Dunbar, & Fainstad, 2023). Similarly, simulation-based resilience-promoting training of police officers was reported to improve levels of the officers' physiological stress response (Andersen, Papazoglou, Koskelainen, Nyman, Gustafsberg, & Arnetz, 2015). These findings support the expectation that resilience skills are teachable, and that their practice can improve well-being even under highly stressful working conditions, like working in the correctional environment.

What Are Some Foundational Matters to Consider When Teaching Resilience?

As described earlier when addressing false resilience, individuals in correctional, law enforcement and military workforce cultures are trained implicitly and/or by example to “play through the pain,” and to deny, minimize or ignore their own needs (Friedman & Higson-Smith, 2003; Spinaris, 2020; Spinaris, 2022). Creating training curriculum for these audiences requires sensitivity to the prevalent basic assumptions that dictate and sustain core beliefs that fuel attitudes of false resilience. That is why resilience-promoting curriculum is best when based not only on the latest valid scientific evidence, but also on the compassionate understanding of correctional workforce cultures. Resilience training aims to help staff build a greater capacity to withstand stressors and bounce back relatively unharmed, and even grow positively as a result of the experience, increasing the capacity for resilience in the future.

Additionally, like any complex construct, resilience has several layers and facets, and it is best taught incrementally, with more advanced skills, such as skills that promote Post-Traumatic Growth, building on more foundational skills, such as self-regulation through Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy skills (Beck, 2019) and other mindfulness skills (Linehan, 2014).

To be continued in the next issue of the Correctional Oasis.

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The most dangerous leadership myth is that
leaders are born—that’s nonsense.

In fact the opposite is true.

Leaders are made.”

Warren Bennis



IN MEMORIAM

Tyler Allan Eden

Correctional Officer
Colorado Department of Corrections

Meredith Portillo

Jail Deputy
Bexar County Sheriff's Office
Texas

Robert William Sumner

Corporal
Oklahoma Department of Corrections

MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



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Mission

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

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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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