

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Staff Sexual Misconduct

© Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D., 2007

Recent events at a Texas youth offender facility bring back the specter of staff sexual misconduct.¹

Regrettably, this abuse of power by staff refuses to go away, as shown by the following quotes.

"According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, a report released in July 2005 found there were an estimated 8,210 allegations of sexual misconduct against prisoners in 2004. An estimated 2,090 incidents were substantiated (not including on-going investigations). And that's in just one year alone. And just what was reported."²

Along the same lines, Kathleen Hawk Sawyer, former Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, reportedly stated that "sexual misconduct has been the single most frustrating issue" during her directorship in the federal prison system.³

Violations are frequently committed by seasoned staff. It is not just the greenhorns who cross the line.⁴

Female as well as male corrections employees violate inmates sexually. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics July 2006 report, 62% of perpetrators of sexual staff misconduct in Federal and state prisons were female, with two-thirds of the incidents of staff misconduct with inmates being reported as "romantic."⁵

Hardly any corrections employee who signs up for the job anticipates getting sexually or romantically involved with offenders. Sometime later, however, something changes for a few of them.

How does that happen?

Staff crosses the line when they start entertaining thoughts of gratifying their *personal* needs through

offenders in their care. When such personal needs kick in at work, "the game is over" for staff.

For some, it is all about lust, seeing inmates as body parts, vehicles for the staff's pleasure.

For others it is about being told they are attractive, desirable or loved.

For yet others it's all about power. For them, the thrill stems from being in control of a person in ways that are rarely possible in the free world.

When not clear if certain behaviors are acceptable to engage in with offenders, staff need to honestly answer this key question: *What needs of mine would get met by doing this?*

Identifying even one self-gratifying benefit to a behavior should constitute a huge STOP light.

Whether something "feels" right is irrelevant. (In the song's lyrics, *If loving you is wrong,*

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IN MEMORIAM

Stephen Anderson
Correctional Officer
June 25, 2007
Fatally shot in Utah hospital
by prison inmate

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UPCOMING DWCO EVENTS AND SERVICES

- DWCO Membership
- DWCO's First Annual Fundraiser Dinner, Thu October 25, The Abbey, Cañon City
- DWCO First Annual Conference on Mental Health Needs of Corrections & Law Enforcement Personnel, Spring 2008, Colorado Springs, CO
- Individualized Week-Long Intensive Psychotherapy Package

Staff Sexual Misconduct

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I don't want to be right, the implication is that "loving you" IS wrong.)

Why is getting romantically or sexually involved with offenders wrong? The reason is that **staff wields power over offenders**. Offenders' privileges, safety and ultimately their freedom are in the hands of staff. Even when offenders instigate romantic overtures, the staff is responsible to uphold professional boundaries. No offender's "offer" or option should be entertained in one's mind or in actuality, no matter how attractive it may sound at the time. Any such behavior IS wrong and there is no way around that fact.

Additional questions staff should ask themselves when tempted to get involved with offenders are:

What will happen if I get found out? What is a fling worth? My job? My family? My reputation? My freedom?

If someone in authority over me was watching me, would I engage in this behavior?

What would I think if a co-worker told me that s/he was engaging in similar behaviors with an offender?

How can staff maintain their professionalism in the face of sexual temptations?

Ethical behavior starts with self-awareness and self-honesty. Staff needs to acknowledge to themselves when they start going down the slippery slope with thoughts such as, *I feel good when s/he smiles at me. I'm trying to find ways to be around this offender*

more. I enjoy his/her compliments.

When a staff member gets to this point, they'd better make a U-turn and go talk to someone they can trust, someone who can also hold them accountable. Otherwise it may be only a matter of time before they act on the temptation, and only a matter of time before they get found out.

Prying oneself away from the magnetizing pull of temptation is no small feat.

Telling oneself, *Just say NO!* won't do it.

Ensuring one has a healthy support system on the outside for meeting personal needs is vital "ethical insurance" for staff, so that they will not turn to offenders for comfort or feelings of power.

Trusted wise peers can also be of help. Mental health professionals may help staff identify ways to manage temptations until they can regain their ethical resolve. And they can help teach staff how to meet their personal needs appropriately "on the outside," and not bring their personal yearnings to the workplace.

¹ www.kwtx.com/home/headlines/6452447.html

² www.prisonlegalnews.org/9862_displayArticle.aspx

³ Layman, E. and McCampbell, S. Definition and National Scope of Staff Sexual Misconduct. NIC Training for Investigators of Staff Sexual Misconduct.

⁴ McCambell, S.W., & Layman, E.P. Investigating allegations of staff sexual misconduct with inmates: Myths and realities. Sheriff, November-December 2001, p. 21.

⁵ www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/svrca05.pdf, p. 9

Less Lonely

From email about the Corrections Ventline. Printed with permission.

I'm a correctional officer of 12 years at a penitentiary. I am so glad to have found out about the services you offer. There has been times in my career that I was in desperate need of the ear of someone who knows what prison work is like. We can't tell

our family about our bad days like they tell us, because it would scare the heck out of them! I can't talk to fellow officers for fear of sounding weak.

Thank you so much. You have no idea how nice it is for me to know this service is available. I've never even talked to you or corresponded in an email, and already it seems so much less lonely.

From the Old Screw

Have I Changed?

Have I changed so much just because I work in Corrections? I have heard this question asked over and over for 35 years and the answer is, YES. Let me count the reasons.

I work a job that I never know when I report for work whether I will see my loved ones again.

I never know if I will get put in a trick bag by the inmates or even by a fellow Staff member.

I work with some inmates that have committed horrific crimes.

I work long hours and sometimes even double shifts.

I work different shifts and must learn to get my rest when I can.

I explain over and over to family and friends, yes, I am home during the day but I have to rest. "No, my darling daughter, I cannot play with you now." "No, my dear spouse, I need sleep and can't do the honey do's now." "Yes, I know the game is on, my friend, but the rest is more important to me and I need it very much." "Yes, my dear, I know you are tired of living with a zombie and yes, dear, I know 'it's get another shift or another wife.'" (Believe you me, this does happen).

At least in today's Corrections it is sometimes easier to get onto another shift. In my early days, an Officer could work years before getting off of his as-

signed shift. And then there's the problem of unwinding after a shift. In another article I called this the need for Down Time. It is so hard for children and even your spouse to understand that sometimes after work you just need to be left alone for a while. You don't want to tell your family about seeing an inmate killed or how close it came to you being hurt. You can't subject them to the filth and sorrow you see each day.

And then there is the short saying that has so much meaning: *YOU'VE CHANGED*. *You're not the loving, caring person I married*. Tension, stress, anger, frustration, fear, death, blood, HIV, and God only knows what else just might have something to do with you changing.

Over the years I have met people who will tell everyone that Corrections doesn't bother them, that they leave it at the door and never take it home. The problem with this is that sometimes the home is now empty of loved ones who couldn't handle your "not changing." But you can be happy. Now you don't have to answer to anyone and can come and go as you want. If you're dumb enough, there is always the booze, and if you are really stupid, then there are other drugs. Yes, I can say *dumb* and I can say *stupid*. When I lost my first marriage, I tried the booze scene. Guess what? It didn't help or work.

Take Care, The Old Screw

Stories Wanted

For a multitude of reasons, it is easy to notice and emphasize the negative in the correctional world. However, our conversations with corrections staff bring us back to the reality that good things are happening behind the walls as well. These incidents—the good news—tend to remain unrecognized or overlooked, and are eventually forgotten.

We have been so uplifted by some of the stories we've heard lately, that we want to bring those good news to the forefront of staff's attention. We

want to share them with others in the correctional field as a means of encouragement, inspiration, positive role-modeling, and even amusement.

So we decided to ask you to send us stories on themes to be described below. We are not concerned about spelling or grammar. Just write the story and mail or email it to us. We'll do the editing. Stories can be anywhere from one paragraph long to three pages long. You can submit them

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Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization
for the well-being of correctional
staff and their families*

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Donate online through PayPal.

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MANY THANKS!

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C-SEAP INQUIRIES

For information about the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program's confidentiality practices and services, please visit the C-SEAP website at <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dhr/eap/eap.htm> or call 1-800-821-8154 to talk with C-SEAP staff.

BLOGS

<http://desertwaters.blogspot.com>
<http://womenincorrections.blogspot.com>

**On July 1 we celebrated two years
of the Corrections Ventline™!**

The Corrections Ventline™
1-866-YOU-VENT
(866.968.8368)
youvent@desertwaters.com

Stories Wanted

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anonymously or with your full name. Sending them to us will be giving us permission to publish your material in our newsletter and on our website. We shall reserve the right of determining which submissions will be used for publication. When we get a sufficient number of stories, we intend to publish them in a volume.

We are looking for stories on the following themes:

1. Staff assisting other staff (helping, mentoring, protecting, encouraging)
2. Staff intervening effectively with inmates (e.g., de-escalating tensions)
3. Stories of courage or integrity
4. Stories of humorous incidents at work
5. Stories of exceptional leadership
6. Stories of exceptional teamwork
7. Stories of problem-solving, such as overcoming chal-

lenges or coming up with innovative solutions

8. Stories of climbing back from the brink of being tempted to violate policy or behave unethically
9. Stories of learning valuable lessons from mistakes made on the job

American Jail Association Seminar COUNTERING CORRECTIONAL OFFICER STRESS & EMOTIONAL SURVIVAL

Trainers: Caterina Spinaris & Christopher Toskey

Date: August 20 - 21, 2007

Location: Reno/Sparks, Nevada

Registration Fees: AJA Member \$295; Non-member \$345

For more info, call AJA at (301) 790-3930 or go to www.aja.org.