

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 3

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MARCH 2008

From Caterina's Desk

DWCO in 2007

Another year has come and gone. Desert Waters Correctional Outreach is now five years old! Your help and support in a multitude of ways make it possible for us to continue extending our services to corrections staff and their family members nationwide. Here is a summary of what you invested in through your contributions to Desert Waters in 2007.

- *The Corrections Ventline*™ Responders responded to 115 contacts—phone, email and face-to-face.
- We intervened with six suicidal corrections staff and four callers concerned about potentially suicidal corrections employees.
- Our newsletter, the *Correctional Oasis*, was sent monthly by email and regular mail to over 3,500 individuals and correctional facilities in the U.S. and Canada. As several recipients forward the e-letter to all staff in their facilities, the estimated number of readers is at least 6,000 per month.
- We offered corrections staff and family members 252 mental health counseling sessions.
- We provided 23 trainings and presentations in six states (CO, FL, KS, MN, MO, OR), with a total of

1,474 staff attending.

- Our 51 volunteers contributed 14,292 hours, an estimated in-kind donation of \$319,794.
- Our website received an average of 17,580 hits per month, with a high of 24,030 hits in 03/07.
- Our articles were featured three times in the e-zine *The Corrections Connection* and in three Colorado newspapers.
- We were featured on the video entitled “They Call Me Fragile.”
- DWCO’s services in 2007 were offered on a budget of \$53,264.

Thank you for helping make all this possible!

IN MEMORIAM

Larry Yates
Senior Officer Specialist
12/03/2007
FCI Memphis

Leila Guy
Health Syst. Specialist
12/06/2007
FCI Talladega

Natalie Terella Jones
Correctional Officer
12/20/2007
FCI Williamsburg

Mark Lorito
Senior Officer Specialist
1/16/2008
FCI Fairton

Joseph Durbin
Inmate Systems Officer
1/28/2008
FCI Loretto

Kenneth Pace
Senior Officer Specialist
1/30/2008
FCI Talladega

KANSAS DOC TRAININGS

Caterina Spinaris Tudor, DWCO's Founding Director, was privileged to offer two trainings and one presentation to staff of the Kansas Dept. of Corrections in Topeka, KS. On February 5 she trained Unit Managers from across the state on *Satisfying the Big 7*. The training was attended by 52 staff. On February 7 she presented *Corrections: From Fatigue to Fulfillment* for Parole & Re-entry staff. This was attended by 168 staff. On February 6 she offered a presentation on *Workplace Interventions for Corrections Staff* to senior staff and executive management of KDOC. Seven attended. Appreciation and thanks go to Secretary Roger Werholtz, Liz Rice, Jennifer Welch, and Karen Williams. May your hard work be richly rewarded!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

CHECK IT AT THE GATE	2
CHECK IT AT THE GATE	3
WORN OUT	4
IMPRISONMENT	4
ANNUAL CONFERENCE	4

Check It At The Gate

Sgt. Barry Evert

A lot of time and effort is spent on ensuring our physical and tactical readiness should we have a major incident in our institution, or even in our community. Countless hours and dollars are spent by research companies working for law enforcement to determine the best and safest tactical practices for almost every conceivable situation; but very little time is spent on our mental well-being.

With a rate of suicide almost ten times more than the general public, we are a sick society. Our divorce rates are staggering, and many of us barely live long enough to enjoy our retirement. Most of us have come to accept these grim statistics as "part of the job." It is high time we change our attitude about this problem, and spend a little time working on our psychological well-being.

The problem is that few departments offer classes or other resources for you to learn from, so it is up to the individual to make changes. A colleague joked to me years ago that maybe I should start a support group. After a long debate on whether or not anyone would show up, I decided it was worth a try. Very informally, I invited several officers to join me during our down time at work to talk about our experiences under the ruse that it would help the rookies learn from us.

What I found out that day was staggering. Out of the fifteen officers who came, eight were divorced, three were in bad health, and two had contemplated suicide at some time while working for the department. The bottom line was the same for all of them: "This job changes you."

More than a little distraught over what I had learned, I decided to talk to more officers, and over the years I have found this pattern among our law enforcement community across the state of California. In my years in corrections, I have encountered numerous officers who have gone over the edge. Everything from suicide to alcoholism seems to be prevalent.

So what is the solution? The old saying "Leave it at the gate" oversimplifies what needs to happen. Many Officers consider themselves correctional or police officers first, second to family life and their community. This way of thinking is admirable, but also needs to be checked.

I can identify with this line of thinking because I feel the same way in many respects. But a clear line needs to be drawn for all of us to appreciate life a little more than we do now. It is bred into us from the academy that we are held to a higher standard than the rest of the community, and we should exemplify morality and trustworthiness at every turn in our private and professional lives. As dedicated professionals I believe most of us do in fact participate in this.

Having said that, it does not mean that we cannot enjoy a dinner at a restaurant because there are too many people, or enjoy our vacations without constantly scanning the crowds for convicts or crooks. This hyper vigilance is what keeps us alive at work, but it needs to be checked at the gate to some extent.

It will always be in our nature to scan a crowd for bad guys, but this does not mean it has to infect every part of our life. We know there are bad guys out there, and we can spot them quicker than anyone else; but does it mean that we have to "patrol" Disneyland as we walk through it with our family? This is the exact behavior that spouses often notice and do not understand. Comments like "You're not at work, honey" can be heard from many officer spouses on outings. Still feeling committed to public safety, we continue our "patrol" but this eventually could put our families in harm's way if we're not careful.

The second biggest problem is our inability to share our problems. Who do we talk to about what we have seen and experiences? Many of us have no one to go to. We do not want to share last night's homicide with our spouse because we were taught to "leave it at the gate."

So our emotions fester inside of us, and we often turn to humor to quell our emotion when something happens at work. How many times have we caught ourselves, or seen other officers standing over a crime scene making jokes about it? A sense of humor will keep you alive, but be aware that it is also how your mind places a barrier against your emotions. The next time you are at a homicide or stabbing in your institution, think to yourself how you really feel about seeing this scene. If it truly does not bother you in any way, consider getting some help.

The solutions are surprisingly easy. First and foremost, make friends outside the department. Make sure that at least half of your friends are not correctional officers, police officers, or in any other way involved with law enforcement. This establishes and retains a baseline to guide you into the "outside world."

Second, do not try to leave your troubles at the gate if they haunt you. Although it is not always necessary to get professional help, this can be beneficial. Try talking to a trusted friend, or better yet, a spouse, about your problems. Many believe that we should shelter our spouses from the dangers and problems of work, but ask any spouse who has been called to the hospital, and they will tell you they wished they knew how dangerous the job was so they could be there for their officer. Yes, spouses will worry about your well-being, but they will be better prepared with an understanding of your job if something, God forbid, should happen. Understanding the risks of

(Continued on page 3)

Check It At The Gate

(Continued from page 2)

any situation makes it inherently easier to deal with. Not only that, it will make your spouse a lot more understanding of your problems as your marriage ages.

Finally, understand that your career as a correctional officer is just that; A career. Nothing more, nothing less. You will not be less of a person when you retire from service, or if you are injured and can no longer work. Many studies have been done, and have found that our badges become our personality and life. Many retirees, or people separated from duty for other reasons, go into a deep depression because they feel they are no longer important.

I am proud to be a CO, and even prouder to be a supervisor in one of the best prisons in America. Having said that, I am also very much aware that my career in corrections could end in an instant, either because of an injury or family situation.

This is not a perpetuation of the myth that we must be “more sensitive” as a society. It is a simple plea for offi-

cers to consider their emotional survival on the job. How many of our colleagues retire, only to wither away physically and emotionally months later? Considering the average recipient in our profession will only see 18 retirement checks before death, we see it a lot.

Don't get caught trying to be a tough guy when it comes to your emotional well-being. This will only result in a decrease in your quality of life, or a lead to a total loss of your family and friends.

Sgt. Barry Evert is a Correctional Sergeant at California's Pelican Bay State Prison, and has been with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for eight years. His specialty lies in teaching riot tactics and officer safety improvement. He is a firm believer that a good home life breeds a good officer, and is currently writing a book, which supports that idea and details the essential skills and techniques new COs should learn in the first two years of their job.

<http://www.corrections.com/news/article?articleid=15947>

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From the Old Screw

Worn Out

As you know, Desert Waters keeps all Ventline contacts confidential. Even if a person gives their name, the names are not written down nor given out.

However, in order to learn, Responders discuss the subjects of the contacts. We try to see how we handled them, what we could have done better or how we could be more helpful.

From our contacts it seems to me that there is a serious problem across the country. Most of the time this problem goes to the very top—the legislators who vote on budgets. This problem seems to affect all corrections, whether Federal, State, Private and County Jails. Workers in all these institutions seems to have the same problem. Because of shortage of staff, the following problems are coming up over and over on the Ventline:

1. Long shifts, especially after incidents
2. Staff being worn out and just plain tired
3. Mandatory overtime when other staff call in sick
4. NOT ENOUGH DOWNTIME
5. Little or no family time
6. Feeling unsupported

7. Because of feeling unsupported, feeling betrayed

8. Safety concerns, that inmates are running things

Staff can and are expected to be ready to go the extra mile. They do. They keep facilities secure, and this is good. The problem is that they are expected to make this happen by going the extra mile over and over, again and again.

I would not want to be a Warden or Administration head at this time. I would not want their budget problems. I would not like to watch my line staff and supervisors wearing themselves out trying so hard to make things work.

Outside of legislators “getting it,” I don't know what the answer is other than to talk about this here and to ask you to call or write the Ventline to let off steam. We will let you rant and rave all you need or want. We know you get tired and see no way out, but call us or someone else, PLEASE.

Take Care,

The Old Screw

Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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Imprisonment

Gary Kalipolites

Many perceive imprisonment as merely a physical structure comprised of walls and bars that keep criminals contained, separate from a free society. The truth however is that we are all imprisoned to some degree, some more than others.

Our captor is our beliefs, especially those that limit our life experience by allowing fear to direct our decision-making. The unknown scares us so much that we avoid it at all costs, because our mind convinces us that only the worst could come out of embarking on something new. So we settle for what we know even if it causes us pain, because we believe that it will only be worse if we take a different path. This "dysfunctional" mental program IS imprisonment! Fear gone wild IS our imprisonment! Anything that limits our ability to express ourselves IS true imprisonment!

I encourage all of you, if your life experience is disharmonious, to begin to identify why that is (without blaming everybody and everything for this being so), so you can identify your captors--those beliefs which are fear-driven and keep you imprisoned long after you leave the prison walls. Learn to become conscious of these

First Annual DWCO Conference

REACHING BEHIND THE WALLS Mental Health & Workplace Wellness for Corrections Staff

Thu May 8 & Fri May 9, 2008
The Castle, Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs, CO

*Addressing interactions between workplace culture,
staff mental health, job performance, and family life.*

Topics include Secondary Traumatic Stress, Staff's "Psychological Survival", Supervising Stressed Staff, Motivational Leadership, Corrections Staff Suicide

Track A: Corrections Staff.

Track B: EAP & other mental health providers.

More information on www.desertwaters.com.

mental programs and take it upon yourself to change them.

When we take responsibility for all that we are and do; we begin to honor ourselves and give others the best of who we are.

Blessings to all.

Come out from behind YOUR "prison walls!"