

# 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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## DWCO Services



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## Critical Incident First Aid™ (CIFA-CP): Data-driven Critical Incident Inoculation Training

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### WHAT

The *Critical Incident First Aid™ for Corrections Professionals* (CIFA-CP) is a scientifically developed web-based educational experience for promoting corrections staff resilience and well-being. The CIFA has dual functionality. It serves as **preventative "inoculation"** training *prior to* exposure to critical incidents. It also serves as a **post-incident intervention** to assist staff *following* exposure to critical incidents. In its preventative capacity, the CIFA can be offered during pre-service (Basic, Orientation) and annual trainings to all agency staff or as an elective training during the course of the year. In its function as an intervention, the CIFA can be provided to staff within 72 hours following their exposure to a critical incident in the line of duty.

*A critical incident is defined as an event that involves violence, injury or death, or the threat of violence, injury or death to oneself or another, experienced or witnessed directly or indirectly.*

The CIFA-CP provides:

1. Corrections-specific content for public safety personnel.
2. Solution-oriented, emotionally-supportive educational material that promotes cognitive, behavioral and emotion-regulation skills.
3. Suggestions for action and particular strategies and resources, prepared from research findings about resilience-promoting behaviors.
4. The Violence, Injury and Death Exposure Scale™ (VIDES)—a valid and reliable assessment instrument which quantifies an employee's magnitude of critical incident exposure, in relation to the number, types and recency of work-related critical incidents to which the employee has been exposed. It provides an interpretation of the assessed individual's VIDES scores, followed by health-supporting recommendations.
5. Comprehension questions by section of material, and where correct answers are provided for any questions answered incorrectly along the way.
6. Handouts consisting of tip sheets, reminders, and key information that can be printed upon completion of the CIFA.
7. Anonymous participation—no identifying information is requested from participants. Participation data and scores are automatically deleted after completion of the CIFA.
8. Privacy—users complete the CIFA on their own.

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**Critical Incident First Aid™** (Continued from page 1)

The CIFA includes information and topics on: (a) what to expect following critical incident exposure, (b) the effects of repeated exposure over time, (c) “red flags”/warning signs and risk factors, (d) dealing with “false guilt,” (e) positive growth following critical incidents, (f) resilience-promoting coping strategies, and (g) resources for wellness support. Organizations who adopt the CIFA can make it available for use in different ways. It can be made available for all staff to access as needed and at their own discretion. It can also be recommended to a particular staff member when observations of events suggest its appropriateness.

The CIFA takes about 50 minutes to complete. The only requirements for its use are availability of a computer in an office or training area, access to the internet, speakers for audio (optional), and a printer.

**WHY**

As “part of the job,” corrections professionals are regularly exposed to critical incidents of various types—high-stress events that involve violence, injury or death, or the threat of such an event, whether direct (they are directly affected or staff witness them directly in real time) or indirect (staff hear, read about, or view them electronically or on video). Such occupational experiences occur at a greater cost than is generally known or acknowledged. Proactive measures that help “inoculate” staff through education *prior* to and *post-incident* assist with both psychological preparedness and management of post-incident experiences. Inoculation is promoted in a variety of ways, such as by instilling in first responders a basis for recognizing signs and effects typical of critical incidents and how to interpret them properly. Preparedness and management is also facilitated through information and knowledge about transience and timing issues, and the availability of effective techniques for reducing negative effects and hastening one’s return to optimal health and functioning—and even positive growth.

Critical incident exposure, whether direct or indirect, and as part of a first responder’s occupation, can have significant negative consequences on health and functioning. These include increased risk of developing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Depression. PTSD, Depression, and especially the two in combination, significantly increase suicide risk and vulnerability to a variety of mental and physical health ailments, as well as sick leave rates, anxiety, stress, substance use, doctor visits, life dissatisfaction, and functional impairments in personal and professional contexts (Denhof & Spinaris, 2013).

Traditionally, incidents have been considered “critical” and warranting debriefing only following *direct* exposure (i.e., when the event happened directly to the employee or the employee witnessed it directly and in real time). However, it is now well understood that repeated or extreme work-related *indirect* exposure (hearing or reading about an event or viewing it electronically), may also result in increased risk of developing PTSD (DSM-5, APA 2013). Therefore, the need for an affordable, corrections-specific, and research-based means to offer critical incident assistance and support is now a virtual necessity.

Increasing numbers of corrections agencies utilize peer supporters or Critical Incident Response Teams to debrief coworkers following critical incidents. While beneficial, this practice, alone (i.e., as a stand-alone intervention), is likely inadequate for a variety of reasons:

1. Corrections workplace cultures are notoriously characterized by an ideology and valuing of “toughness” that stigmatizes and deters individuals from communicating about or even acknowledging emotional difficulties. This can deter staff from attending or participating fully in debriefings with Critical Incident Response Teams.
2. The debriefing protocol may not be implemented effectively or consistently over time.
3. Logistical and operational issues may prevent a debriefing from taking place or in a timely manner.

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**Critical Incident First Aid™** (Continued from page 2)

4. Some incidents may be defined within the workplace culture as a normal “part of the job” and therefore not warranting debriefing, even if experienced as highly disturbing by staff. This is highly problematic as research has made clear that there is substantial variability in how events are interpreted and responded to from one individual to the next.
5. Indirect exposure to critical incidents is frequently minimized and underestimated for its potential for harm if left unaddressed.

The following are advantages of the CIFA as a stand-alone training resource for staff or as a supplement to existing resources, such as Critical Incident Response Teams, deployed following the occurrence of critical incidents:

1. As an e-learning experience taken individually, the CIFA offers psychological safety through anonymity and privacy, resulting in greater participation from individuals who would otherwise opt-out due to fear of being regarded by others as “weak.”
2. Taken annually, as an elective training, as part of pre-service academy, or post-incident, the CIFA provides emotional support and psychological preparedness to inoculate the impact of future exposures to critical incidents, and regardless of whether they are experienced directly or indirectly.
3. The CIFA teaches resilience-promoting behaviors and strategies, applicable in both professional and personal lives, and that can have a symptom-deterring or symptom-buffering effect.
4. The CIFA provides research-supported health promoting-strategies, on cognitive, behavioral and emotional levels.
5. The CIFA addresses not only particular critical incidents, but the cumulative effect of repeated incidents and high-stress events that are the norm in most corrections settings. The cumulative impact of critical incidents is addressed scientifically through the CIFA’s incorporation of the Violence, Injury and Death Exposure Scale™ (VIDES), which provides an objective score, interpretation, and recommendations.
6. The CIFA offers a standardized experience of psychological support and learning. All staff are presented with the same material, and in the same order, eliminating inconsistencies, omissions or errors in content delivery.
7. Due to its 24/7 accessibility, and to its accessibility to any number of staff at the same time, the CIFA can be provided as a post-incident intervention in a timely and efficient manner—ideally within 72 hours of exposure.
8. Staff can request to take the CIFA at any time during the year, or following an incident that was disturbing to them—whether they were exposed to it directly or indirectly, and at their discretion, and as often as they choose. In addition, administrators and supervisors may request that any number of staff exposed (whether directly or indirectly) to a critical incident take the CIFA as a wellness-promoting precaution.
9. The CIFA is continually updated with improvements and as informed by research advances over time. As an online, web-based resource, subscribers also benefit from seamless updates, without delays, or the need for local technical support.

**Critical Incident First Aid™** (Continued from page 3)

**HOW**

- Agencies subscribe to the CIFA for a 12-month period, which permits as many uses as needed for all of their staff for pre-service, annual and/or elective training and uses following critical incidents, and for use by any staff members at their discretion.
- Subscribing agencies are provided with a web link to the CIFA and a password covering all staff within a subscribing facility.
- Executive staff should inform all employees that the CIFA is available to them as a health-supporting resource in relation to exposure to critical incidents at work and how and when it can be accessed for anonymous use.
- Supervisors can also discreetly refer subordinates to take the CIFA anonymously on occasions when they become aware that one or more staff members were exposed to an incident that may warrant it.
- Self-referred staff or those referred by supervisors can take the CIFA anonymously at any computer terminal with internet access, and at a location away from distractions.
- Staff offered the CIFA as part of pre-service or annual training can be scheduled by their agencies to take the training periodically, such as annually.

**BENEFITS**

The following are expected<sup>1</sup> beneficial outcomes<sup>2</sup> of the CIFA in relation to critical incident exposure:

- Concrete evidence of administration's caring for and support of staff (by offering this service).
- Psychological preparedness through "inoculation" training prior to critical incident exposure.
- Promotion of increased self-awareness and prompting of self-care activities through completion of a scientifically developed assessment, the VIDES—which results in an estimate of the magnitude of cumulative critical incident exposures.
- Expanded and research-driven support following critical incidents.
- Reduced litigation potential due to negative staff behaviors associated with critical incidents and their effects.
- Reduced litigation potential due to an agency's failure to acknowledge or respond to the effects of critical incidents.
- Reduced critical incident impact on job functioning/performance.
- Reduced absenteeism in relation to critical incident exposure.
- Reduced risk of developing enduring signs of Corrections Fatigue, anxiety, depression, and/or PTSD.
- Reduced staff suicide risk.

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**Critical Incident First Aid™** (Continued from page 4)

<sup>1</sup>Expected benefits are partially based upon research findings supporting relationships between VIDES scores and validated assessments of Corrections Fatigue, Depression, PTSD, and Suicide Risk. (See next page for a summary of relevant research findings).

<sup>2</sup>Beneficial outcomes require staff to act on provided suggestions and recommendations, and assume follow through of staff with recommended referrals.

**Disclaimer:** No assessment or educational system, including the CIFA, can guarantee effectiveness in every individual case (e.g., prevent suicide, or reduce Corrections Fatigue, anxiety, depression, or PTSD 100% of the time). Rather, it represents a scientifically-based strategy for reducing the odds of these circumstances or events.

REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5) (Fifth Ed.)*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

Denhof, M.D., & Spinaris, C.G. (2013). [Depression, PTSD, and Comorbidity in United States Corrections Professionals: Impact on Health and Functioning.](#)

The CIFA is also offered as a customized program for: (a) Police Officers and (b) Sheriff Deputies Road Patrol.

**CONTACT US FOR A QUOTE OR FOR AN ONLINE CONTENT SAMPLE.**

Email: [Caterina Spinaris](mailto:Caterina.Spinaris); phone: 719-784-4727

**What Others Have Said about the CIFA**

*I took the CIFA e-learning module and found the educational material very beneficial. The educational material, along with the quizzes did a good job of outlining symptoms to be aware of and why they might be occurring. The questions regarding exposure to a critical incident covered a wide range of possibilities that one may not realize affected them.*

~Jody Knoell, LPC, CCHP-MH, Mental Health Therapist

*The focus on the aftermath of critical incidents is very important and a part of Corrections that may fall short because of the push to get right back to normal operations, sometimes without the proper debriefs and follow up. The CIFA Module helps staff to recognize what they go through.*

~Sgt. Michael Van Patten, Oregon State Penitentiary, AOCE President

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## By the Numbers: DWCO Annual Report in Brief

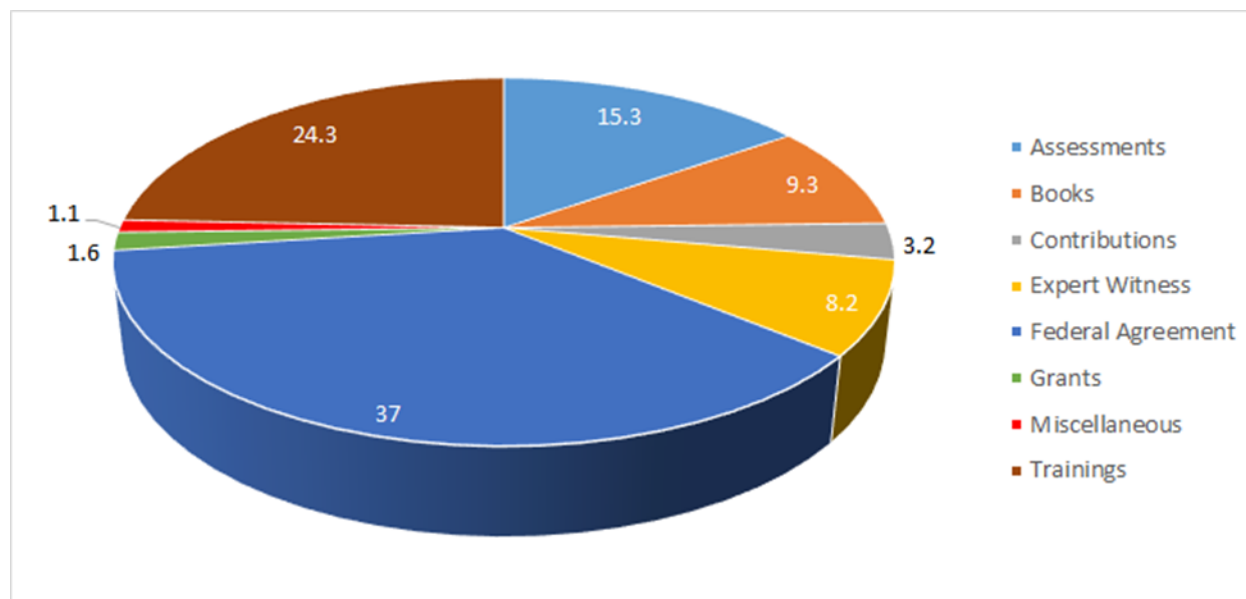
- \* Agency Assessments Conducted → 8
- \* Awards → 1
- \* Correctional Oasis → made available to 30,000-35,000 corrections professionals monthly
- \* CF2F Instructor Trainings → 13
- \* Conference Presentations/Other Trainings → 10
- \* Electronic Courses Offered → 1
- \* Expert Witness Testimony → 2
- \* Grants → 2
- \* New Assessment Instruments Offered → 4
- \* NIC Cooperative Agreements → 2
- \* Publications → 13
- \* States Where Services Offered → 15
- \* Webinars → 2
- \* Total Income → \$305,555.21

*(A few edits were made compared to the article by the same title printed in the February 2015 issue.)*

Again, none of these accomplishments would have been possible without DWCO's dedicated, gifted and hard-working Team, for which we are more than grateful!

A more detailed annual report for 2014 is posted on DWCO's website under [About](#).

### DWCO 2014 OPERATING REVENUES





## **After Discipline How to Recover From and Progress After Discipline**

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When I sat down to write this article about how to handle being disciplined while working in the corrections business, I really struggled to offer advice that would apply to most situations. It occurred to me that my struggle revolved around the issue of whether or not the discipline was deserved. This may seem like a very subjective issue, but I believe it is critical to understand, before real strategies can be offered.

As a result, I offer two different types of advice, for two different types of scenarios.

**A. If a correctional employee is held accountable for a mistake that they clearly made, then the likelihood that they can move past that mistake and continue to progress in a corrections career is high.** With the number of policies, oversight bodies and the constant state of change, just understanding the policies in place can be a challenge, so it is likely a mistake could be made in this business. I don't offer this as an excuse, but as a way to describe the context of corrections work. The fact is that most corrections professional have made mistakes, and I venture to say that many have been held accountable either through a formal discipline process, a failure to be promoted, or in the court systems. However, this is not something that is often discussed easily in this culture. I can think of many people who I worked with over the years that were held accountable through the formal discipline process, but they rarely revealed this fact until we had formed a strong relationship. It seems counterintuitive that we are in the business of corrections, yet our culture expects our employees to be flawless. But that is often the message that we receive so we hide this part of our work history, when possible.

I propose that a better approach for all corrections employees is that these mistakes should be pulled out of the shadows and shared. We need to remember that the job is what we do, not who we are. Towards that end, talking about our mistakes and the consequences will help to normalize the fact that mistakes are made by normal, hardworking corrections employees. This type of openness can spread the message that the system holds people accountable in a reasonable manner. This type of behavior can spread the organizational values of fairness and accountability.

The other advantage of discussing discipline more openly is that it allows the people that were held accountable to be part of the solution to areas of practice or policy that are unclear. Many times mistakes that are made can be traced back to policy, practice or training. Who better than those who were confused and unable to accurately complete the task, to be able to make the requirements more clear?

**B. The second type of discipline is much more difficult to move past. If a corrections employee is held accountable for something they did not do, or the accountability is really about furthering a political agenda, then recovery is more difficult.** In the "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment" course, one of the phases of professional change that is presented as possibly resulting in Corrections Fatigue is a bubble-bursting phase or event.

A bubble-bursting event can lead corrections employees toward feelings of betrayal, resentment and being used as a scapegoat. One corrections employee described a bubble-bursting event as the moment she felt disposable. Another employee described a situation where she was held accountable to a rule for which no one else followed. A natural reaction to this type of event is described as the phase of wall building. During the wall building phase a corrections employee may withdraw from co-workers, from extra assignments, and even from doing their job fully and completely. While it may be natural to withdraw in an effort to protect oneself from further attack, this can lead to more serious issues for the employees and the work group. Remember, the inmates are watching this process and are probably very aware of exactly what it going on.

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### After Discipline (Continued from page 7)

Overcoming this type of bubble bursting and wall building and moving towards fulfillment and growth in this business can be daunting, but the most important step that must be taken is to recognize the situation for what it is. Understanding and being able to accurately evaluate the political landscape can be easier said than done, but there are few steps that should be considered.



First, use the system. Most government agencies have grievance or appeal procedures, but the corrections culture often discourages people from using these systems. The culture labels people that file grievances as trouble makers. This is not that different from the way corrections employees feel about inmates who use the grievance systems or courts to settle their issues. If an employee is held accountable for something they were not responsible for, using these response systems is critical. At this point, they are past a fear of reprisal, because they have already suffered that reprisal.

Even if these appeal systems don't provide relief, others will be watching to see how the system works and how the system responds. This is vital information for anyone working in these types of bureaucracies.

The next step or perhaps a simultaneous step is to access your options. Options may include looking for other employment. This may be difficult, especially when the employee involved believes that they are fully committed to the corrections work. Sometimes we get so immersed in the system in which we work that we fail to consider other outside choices, even other government employment options.

When a friend of mine started in corrections in the early 1980s, he was told that he wasn't going to be any good to corrections for the first five years, then after five years he wouldn't be any good for anything else. We could argue about whether it is five years or five months, but the message is clear- the culture communicates that it will be difficult if not impossible to leave corrections work and find a good job elsewhere.

I have presented these two types of discipline as if the line is very clear between being disciplined appropriately and being part of a political fallout situation. However, I believe that often there may be elements of both situations involved. Again, being able to own what is yours to own and then to use the system for what is not yours is imperative.

Any type of discipline may provide an opportunity to re-evaluate your life plan. Is this work really where you want to be and want to stay? Are there options that you have not considered, even within the same organization? I have talked to employees who left corrections, after they were faced with discipline and I am often pleasantly surprised by the number who used this situation to make a positive change in their life. One person told me that the investigation into his incident pushed him out of his comfort zone and he was thankful for the push.

Obviously, not all situations can be described this positively, but those who used the events to make positive changes, even if they remained within corrections, were those who took some control of the situation. In one instance, the employee became an advocate for himself and defended his actions and the actions of his co-workers. In another instance, an employee remained employed in corrections while she returned to college to pursue another career.

The corrections culture dictates that we don't reveal our weaknesses and that includes silence regarding the disciplinary process. I would love to hear from our readers about strategies that they have used to positively move past a disciplinary incident.

If you have comments or advice you would like to share, please forward that information to [Susan Jones](#). I will review the information and offer a follow up article that may include your suggestions.



## The Proud the Chosen Few

Here's to the men and women of USA Corrections  
 May you lift your coffee mugs high  
 You are Professional Correctional Officers on this you can rely  
 You are Professional Correctional Officers not to be confused with Guard  
 For a Guard has four feet and bad breath and lays out in the yard  
 You watch over your flock through day and night until their sentences are through  
 You do your eight , ten or twelve and hit the gate you are the Proud the Chosen Few!



*Mike Williams*  
*Correctional Training Instructor II*  
*North Carolina Department of Public Safety*

Mike wrote this for his Basic Correctional Officer Graduation 20 years ago. Reprinted with permission.

## Input from Instructors of Desert Waters' Course "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™" (CF2F)

*Thank you so much for the work you put into this material. ... We now are teaching the CF2F material during our in-service training. ... I think the classes in general have bought into the ideas because of the personal experiences we share regarding our own battles with Corrections Fatigue. They are seeing us as experiencing the same things they are despite our rank. Officers have opened up pretty well during class and the feedback has been better than I expected. I have received emails and have spoken with officers individually who have given me heartfelt thanks for the class. I really think we are helping our staff to change the culture in our jail. On a personal note, since attending class last year, I have made more connections in my personal life. I have seen the impact I have had on other people's lives by making these connections. I live by the ABCD's. I am "all in" ... people are responding. That is so exciting! Again, thanks for your research and training. You have had a great impact on my life, and I am beginning to see the "ripple effects."*

~Anonymous Sgt.

*I wanted you to know that your training remains the most relevant stress management training I've received to date. I share it every chance I get. God bless you and keep you.*

~ Lucinda Smith

**Next 4-day Instructor Training for the course "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™" at DWCO's offices, Florence, CO: [October 6-9, 2015](#)**



## Have I Changed?



“Have you changed so much just because you work in Corrections?” I have heard this question asked over and over for 35 years, and yes, they were serious. So let me count the reasons. Let me count the ways.

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 sometimes people call the dregs of society and some that seem to have almost no IQ.

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 get 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 assigned shift.

And then there's the problem of unwinding after a shift. In other articles I call it 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 small saying with so much meaning, YOU'VE CHANGED. You're not the loving, caring person I married. Tension, stress, anger, frustration, apprehension, death, blood, HIV, and Lord only knows what else just might have something to do with you changing.

Over the years I have meet people who will tell everyone that Corrections doesn't bother them, they leave it at the door and never take it home. The problem with this is, sometimes the home is now empty of loved ones that couldn't handle your "Not Changing." But you can be happy; you now 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's the drugs. Yes, I can say dumb. When I lost my first marriage, I tried the booze scene. Guess what, it didn't help and it didn't work.

Take Care,  
*The Old Screw*

## Recent DWCO Publications Posted on NIC's Site

- ⇒ [Occupational Stressors in Corrections Work Annotated Bibliography](#)
- ⇒ [Countering Staff Stress—Why and How](#)

## Quote of the Month

The first duty of love is to listen.  
~ Paul Tillich

## Desert Waters Correctional Outreach



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

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<http://desertwaters.com>

Contributions are tax-deductible.

[http://desertwaters.com/?page\\_id=2237](http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=2237)

### **If the *Correctional Oasis* is Helpful to You or to Your Loved Ones ...**

**... or if you value Desert Waters' work and mission and  
would like to support it,**

please make a one-time or a monthly tax-deductible  
[contribution](#).

Thank you for partnering with us to help us accomplish  
our mission.

## Many Thanks!

Thank you for supporting  
the mission of Desert Waters  
through your tax-deductible contributions.

**Individual donors:** Anonymous donors; TC & Joellen Brown; Colorado Combined Campaign donors; Warren Lohnes, Jr.; Jeff & Connie Mueller; Kevin & Robin Rivard.

**Business donors:** Janice Graham, CPA

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### **DWCO Disclaimer**

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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](#).

## **DWCO Mission**

To promote the health and wellness of the public safety workforce through the provision of customized, data-driven, and evidence-based solutions.