



Department of
Youth Services

Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed
Desert Waters: The Road to Wellness

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Any job can be stressful, but the field of corrections has particular characteristics that can lead to an elevated level of stress. Employees in this field need to be aware of this fact and learn appropriate stress management techniques to keep stress at bay.

In the last six months, you have become acquainted with programs such as Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) to support staff when they experience trauma and Peer Assistance to help staff with personal issues.

I want our agency to have access to a variety of tools and resources that will educate DYS employees on how to cope with the daily stress of working in correctional facilities. Soon you will hear about Desert Waters and corrections fatigue.

“Desert Waters isn't just about dealing with trauma from assaults, but it's also stress from mandatory overtime, facility closures, staffing concerns, even just change,” said Amy Ast, Bureau Chief of Facility Operations.

If stress from the job is not managed effectively, employees who suffer from corrections fatigue can undergo behavioral or personality changes that are difficult to reverse and can spur negative effects on both personal and professional levels.

Factors that contribute to correctional fatigue:

- Nature of the job
- Role conflict
- Nature of some of the youth
- Negative workplace environment
- Frustrating work situations
- Overload
- Exposure to traumatic material
- Coworker personality styles
- Lack of effective support systems

Recently, 15 employees attended Desert Waters training sessions. These trainers will now educate DYS employees, commencing with Circleville JCF, followed by Indian River JCF and Cuyahoga Hills JCF.



Participants of the Desert Waters training sessions with Dr. Caterina Spinaris (second from the left), Executive Director of Desert Waters Correctional Outreach

Penny Harless, a Guidance Counselor at Indian River JCF and a participant in the training, speaks highly of Desert Waters and its benefits. “The Desert Waters program is a tremendous opportunity for all employees to embark upon a road to healing,” she said. “For me, Desert Waters can best be described as a program that engenders hope... and a wellness program that reaches into every area of our lives. This program provides the opportunity for us to become better mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and children.”

“Like many others, I can say with absolute certainty that Desert Waters was the best training session I have ever attended. After the first day, I knew this training would be a huge benefit to our staff at DYS. My belief is that it will help people feel they are not alone, and for some, it will help them heal,” said Yolanda Frierson, Deputy Superintendent of Direct Services at Circleville JCF.

Employees are our greatest asset. We need to help each other become healthy individuals, personally and professionally, so that we can focus on the health and well-being of youth.