



In this issue:

Collaboration with the
Marianas Tri-Agency Page 1

Consumer Success
Story: Liane Page 3

OVR Website: A Wealth
of Information and
Resources Page 3

Stop Using the Word
Handicapped for People .. Page 4

Voices of the CNMI -
Tinian Chapter: 2015
Summer Camp Report . . . Page 5

WIOA and Pre-Employment
Transition Services Page 6



Collaboration with the Marianas Tri-Agency

A Success Story



To set the context, we'll provide brief history and geography lessons. The U.S. Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is a protectorate of the United States of America in the North Pacific. The Marianas is located just north of the Island of Guam and South East of Japan and is made up of 14 islands. Within the islands the majority of the populous lives on three of these islands - Rota, Saipan, and Tinian.

With that said, the CNMI

Tri-Agency includes the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI), the Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD), and the Northern Marianas College (NMC) University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) in partnership with Hawaii's Pacific Basin University Center in Developmental Disabilities. However, the success of the Tri-Agency is largely due to opening its doors to include the Office of Vocational

Rehabilitation, Center for Living Independently, non-profit disability organizations to include the CNMI's Autism Society and the Voices of the CNMI. The CNMI's Tri-Agency has rebranded the term Tri-Agency and has provided an appropriate title called CNMI's Disability Network Partners (DNP).

The DNP has three common goals, with the overarching goal of helping the citizens of the CNMI. The first shared goal is to partner and or support each other, as much as possible, in sanctioned events and activities. The second shared goal is to reach out and provide research based training to as many clients and

service-providers as possible. The third shared goal, of the DNP, is to be at the forefront in support of disability rights within the Commonwealth.

The DNP holds meetings, with representatives from all three islands, either in person, or by phone/Skype/Zoom. To further fuse the partnerships, these meetings are held at least monthly, to develop collaborative events and establish cost sharing agreements. Cost sharing has provided the opportunity for the CNMI Disability Network Partners to not only meet individual program goals but to save money and thus provide more extensive services. In addition, cost sharing has led to

a greater sense of ownership across delivered activities and more comradery among the partners. This has led to increased attendance and participation during events and activities, by both partners and consumers. Furthermore, outside social gatherings are a regular occurrence thus insuring continuous dialog among programs. Just imagine a social/work gathering by the beach... Enough said.

In conclusion, where are the Marianas you may ask? Well now you have an idea. As for the Disability Network Partners they are committed towards one common goal which is to help its citizens by working together.



Consumer Success Story: Liane

I applied for vocational rehabilitation services when I was a transition student. With the support of my mother and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, I was able to do my work experience training (WET) at the Tinian Elementary School library and my on-the-job training (OJT) as a Day Care Worker. The experiences and the journey made me realize that by following through and seeking assistance, I can do anything. Right now, I enjoy my work as an Administrative Assistant for our public library, especially working with children and meeting people. I work full-time and earn a competitive hourly wage.



I appreciate all the assistance provided to me by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. In addition, I would like to thank my supervisors, teachers, family, and friends in guiding and believing in me.

I encourage anyone with a disability who experiences difficulty in finding employment to reach out to OVR for assistance. They have made a positive difference in my life, and they can help you, too.

OVR Website: A Wealth of Information & Resources



If you are a person with a disability primarily interested in work, an employer or supervisor who is looking for disability employment resources, or a service provider/community rehabilitation partner (e.g., SPED teachers, counselors, etc.), OVR offers a wealth of information on their website at www.ovrgov.net.

Just some of the information or resources available are:

ABOUT OVR

Mission and Values
Interagency Agreements
Policy and Procedures Manual

EMPLOYMENT

By clicking on this link, you'll be taken to some job search websites for the CNMI, such as Department of Labor, Public School System, Northern Marianas College, and the Office of Personnel Management.

EMPLOYERS

If you are an employer or business owner, we invite you to peruse this link that offers information on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), Tax Incentives for Improving Accessibility, Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction, and Reasonable Accommodations. Also, check out the Job Accommodations Network (JAN) online at <https://askjan.org> for great information sure to benefit employers!



NEWS

The Council on Developmental Disabilities, NMPASI, NMC-UCEDD, and OVR are proud co-producers of their quarterly newsletter called "Disability Watch". Volume 1 Issues 1-3 are available for your reading pleasure.

TRANSITION

Students with disabilities in the high school or their parents or family members as well as SPED personnel may be

interested in this section of our website. We encourage you to learn about the role of OVR in school-to-work transition, the responsibilities of our VR Transition Counselor, and information regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services, a mandate of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.

Frequently Asked Questions about OVR covers eligibility, informed choice, confidentiality, financial participation, etc. At the bottom of OVR's home page, you'll have access to

reports such as the 2014 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), 2014 Annual Report, 2015 State Plan, State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) as well as links to our local partners: WIA, NMC-UCEDD, DD Council, NMPASI, COTA, and PSS-SPED.

If you have any questions pertaining to information on our website, please send an email to Josephine Tudela at nmidir@ovrgov.net.

Stop Using the Word ~~HANDICAPPED~~ for People

On November 19, 2015, I read an article on the front page of the Saipan Tribune which was titled "Man Stabs his Handicapped Mom." As president of the Statewide Independent Living Council, I am disturbed that we still use this word to refer to people in the CNMI today.

The word "handicapped" has traditionally been used to refer to people with disabilities. Post World War I and II, people who served during the war who lost limbs or were shell-shocked would sometimes be seen using their hat in their hand to ask for handouts. This practice led to the use of this word in America to mean people with disabilities. It was actually used in federal laws until 1990. It was deemed inappropriate in 1990 because it degrades the value of a person. People first language movement began then and pushed for dignity and respect for all people with disabilities. According to the movement, we should place the value of a human being before any disability, for example, a man with a disability, and not a disabled or handicapped man.

I am requesting the newspapers to adhere to the People First Language Movement and stop using "handicapped" to refer to our people with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration with this important issue.

EMETERIO FITIAL
SILC President



VOICES OF THE CNMI – TINIAN CHAPTER

2015 SUMMER CAMP REPORT

Monika Diaz author, and Vice President of VOICES Tinian Chapter



Our plans for our 3rd annual summer camp was scheduled for August 14 & 15, 2015, however, due to the weather (tropical storm), we had to postpone the 2nd day and it was held the following weekend.

On August 14, 2015, we had our 3rd Annual Summer Camp for the Voices of the CNMI Tinian Chapter at Kammer Beach Main Pavillion 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. We had over 75 parents, individuals with disabilities, volunteers and elected officials. The night started out with briefing of the organization, consisted of so many activities such as bon-fire, glow in the dark, capture the flag, story-telling and activities on diversity. There were presentations on self-advocacy,

leadership and diversity.

We had a tropical storm warning again so we had to postpone the second day until the following weekend. On August 22, 2015 was the continuation of the 3rd Annual summer camp from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Kammer Beach, Main Pavillion. We had over 100 parents, individuals with disabilities, volunteers and elected officials and 25 of the participants were self-advocates. The day consisted of a self-advocacy presentation and recruitment,



swimming, kite flying, over and underwater, and a raffle.

While the kids were having fun, the self-advocates had sessions with 20 parents and volunteers discussing some issues about self-advocacy and how to get help; leadership, diversity and touched on individualized education plans and 504 plans; and rights of individuals with disabilities.

We were able to distribute the remaining school supplies from the 2015 School Supplies Drive (The Untalan Families in Oregon donated school supplies and money towards shipping costs).



We would like to thank the following sponsors and donors who made this summer camp a success:

Tinian's Mayors Office, Tinian Municipal Council, Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino, Tinian Health Center, The Undeniable Company, Bank of Guam, Marynita Cepeda & Darius Pettis, Northern Marianas College-UCEDD, SN-5 Enterprises, Mr. Kwon from ChaCha Poker, Marianas Visitors Bureau and DD Council.

WIOA and Pre-Employment Transition Services

In 2014, President Obama signed into law the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In part, WIOA requires public vocational rehabilitation programs to make available to students with disabilities Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) to prepare them for the 21st century workforce. Examples of such services are: (1) job exploration counseling; (2) work-based learning experiences, in-school or after school, including internships; (3) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher learning; (4) work readiness training; and (5) instructions in self-advocacy.

Below, please find some of the new initiatives the CNMI OVR has undertaken in recent years to highlight our Transition program and provide improved services:

- In December 2014, we hired a Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselor (VRTC) to develop and/or strengthen partnerships with the students/families, the Public School System-Special Education Program (PSS-SPED), the Northern Marianas College (NMC), the Northern Marianas Trades Institute (NMTI), and other partners to ensure the provision of timely and quality Pre-Employment Transition Services, consistent with the WIOA.

- Our VRTC, Ms. Colleen Diaz, continues to implement the practice of co-location, where she is based at the public high schools statewide for a few hours each month to bring greater awareness about the VR program, conduct Q&A with stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, and school personnel), entertain applications for VR services, conduct initial interviews, and increase referrals to OVR. Students with disabilities are being accommodated by way of serving them at the school campus, instead of requiring them to visit the OVR main office, which otherwise would be an unnecessary disruption and great inconvenience to them and other stakeholders. Co-location has expanded to include those at the college and trades school campuses.

- In May 2015, CNMI OVR and the PSS-SPED renewed its Memorandum of Understanding to include the WIOA requirement of Pre-Employment Transition Services as well as took into consideration the Transition findings from our 2014 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Additionally, this MOU guarantees that a mutual client would be able to take with them their assistive technology, which OVR would purchase from the PSS-SPED at the item's depreciated value. Our consumers (students) and their families have found this process of AT transfer to be effective, timely, and appreciated.

- We continue to support the professional development of our staff in the areas of Transition and Assistive Technology, maximizing training opportunities that are offered locally, regionally, and nationally, funds permitting.

- We continue to increase opportunities for dialogue with our secondary education partners to strengthen coordination towards the provision of pre employment transition services through cost sharing measures.

In FY 2016, CNMI OVR, in collaboration with its school partners, will be exploring the "I'm Determined" summit or training camp (summer activity); instructions in self-advocacy to be facilitated by CNMI's self advocates; OVR counselors to introduce the VR program to students with disabilities who are in their freshman year of high school (the sooner, the better!); increase leveraging of resources and expertise with partners able to contribute to the provision of work experience and on-the-job trainings; and furthering discussions regarding the implementation of "Educational Coaches" in the classrooms (high school and college).

To learn more about OVR's School-to-Work Transition Program or to provide your feedback on how we can improve collaboration and coordination, please contact Ms. Colleen Diaz or Ms. Josephine Tudela at nmidir@ovrgov.net.

THINK ABILITY, NOT DISABILITY

#TEAMKOKA
VOICES OF THE CNMI

2ND ANNUAL

GLOW
WALK
RUN
& WHEEL



SATURDAY | DEC 26 | 5:30PM | NATIBU PARK

CHECK IN @ 4:30PM

Register with Janeth Barcinas (at TES), Martina and Mikaela Diaz (at THS), Maria Aguon (at NMC) or contact Monika Diaz at (670)433-3800 before Dec. 7.

\$10 registration includes a bag and glow sticks.

The first 100 people to register will receive an event t-shirt by The Undeniable.

Volunteers may also receive an event t-shirt. To volunteer, contact Monika Diaz.

Refreshments will be served upon completion.

Collaborative Advocacy

By: Jim Rayphand

(Previously published in Marianas Variety and Saipan Tribune)

Advocacy at the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. is something of a paradox, treading a fine line between a hammer and the delicate tongue of diplomacy — ever looking for the sweet-spot between our statutory standing and personal finesse.

Maybe it's our small-town beings, but experience has shown that it's the positive relationships we develop with people that open doors for us and for the people with disabilities we represent. It's taken a fair share of hammering, yelling matches and high blood pressures to come to this conclusion, but we're comfortable in saying that we achieve desired outcomes far more expeditiously and with greater satisfaction through collaborative advocacy.

That said, working collaboratively is not synonymous with turning a blind eye, shying away from the hard questions, or conceding our rights and the rights of our clients to appease anyone, much less the curmudgeon, little personalities we come across on occasion. You know the ones who seem to hurt when they smile and stutter at the thought of a kind word. Obstructionists who can say in one breath that they, "are not inclined to participate in any further conversation...and will not be agreeing to meet with

you...but look forward to continued positive relations" — a true-life quote. The thing about relying on diplomacy is that in one fell swoop, the stacks and years of relational building blocks can crash down around us — not that the hammer is soft, mind you, but our finesse is shaken and egos are a little worse for the wear.

By and large, the majority of people we come across want to work with us, but others feel slighted just by our mere presence — maybe we look at them cross-eyed or don't beat around bush enough, so often the lines of communication get shut down long before we can even say hello. Our attempts at diplomacy fall short and then it's a turf war. Inevitably our "access authority" comes into question and like a bad episode of Ground Hogs Day, we go back to dusting off the same, worn-out pages of our federal statutes — the Hammer, if you will — one of which requires that we "protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities" [42 USC §15043 (a)(1)] and the federal regulations which mandate that our office shall, among other things —

- have reasonable unaccompanied access to public and private facilities which provide services, supports, and other assistance for individuals with developmental disabilities in

the state when necessary to conduct a full investigation of an incident of abuse or neglect [42 CFR 1386.22(f)];

- have unaccompanied access to all residents of a facility at reasonable times, which at a minimum shall include normal working hours and visiting hours (emphasis added) [42 CFR 1386.22(g)]

Admittedly, it is somewhat unique to have a relatively tiny, non-profit organization with governmental, oversight authority, but such is the case.

Still, as a matter of policy, NMPASI remains partial to the course of least resistance — we'll work with just about anyone to achieve our primary mission "to protect the civil, legal and human interests of individuals with disabilities" — we can do great things on behalf of our people with disabilities and, subsequently, for the community at large — Nge inamwo schagh igha mesemwal u se su ghii asamal iimomw nge u bwe sughi asamal bwulomw... faischo [Translation: It's o.k. if, at first, you don't open the doors to your house, so long as you open the doors to your heart...respectfully].

For more on Protection & Advocacy Systems, please contact the NMPASI Office at (670) 235-7273/4 [tel] / 235-7275 [fax] / 235-7278 [tty] or on-line at www.nmpasi.org.