Te Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) held a New UCEDD Directors Orientation in Washington, DC on June 3-4, 2019. There are 67 UCEDDs across the United States and in the territories. This year, five new UCEDD Directors attended the orientation.

**New UCEDD Directors:**
- **Cindy Thomas**, University of Massachusetts Boston;
- **Joanne Siegel**, Albert Einstein College of Medicine;
- **Susan Fox**, New York Medical College
- **Derrick Willis**, University of Iowa Health Care;
- **Jennifer-Eileen Castro**, Northern Marianas College

**AUCD Staff:**
- **Andrew Imparato**, AUCD Executive Director;
- **Dawn Rudolph**, Senior Director, AUCD Technical Assistance & Network Engagement;
- **John Tischida**, AUCD Associate Executive Director for Research and Policy;
- **Rylin Rodgers**, AUCD Director of Public Policy
New UCEDD Director

Jennifer-Eilleen E. Castro

Jennifer-Eilleen E. Castro is the new Director for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at the Northern Marianas College (NMC), which falls under the Pacific Basin University Centers for Excellence (PBUCE) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Growing up with a younger brother with Autism, Jennifer is passionate about advocating for individuals with disabilities. She started working at NMC in May 2017 as the UCEDD’s first Program Manager, and served as Interim Director for 7 months.

In her capacity as CNMI UCEDD’s Director, she works closely with the CNMI’s disability agencies, self-advocacy organizations, community groups, and education institutions to help improve the lives of the individuals with disabilities and their family members by coordinating trainings, disseminating information, conducting research, and providing technical assistance.

Jennifer was also the first CNMI applicant to be selected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) as the CDC’s Act Early Ambassador to the CNMI, promoting the CDC’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early Program,” for 2019-2021. In her region, she serves as the Vice-Chairperson for the Pacific Basin Interagency Leadership Consortium (PBILC), which encourages and supports the growth of new leaders in the disability field “the Pacific Way;” PBILC’s membership includes the island nations of the CNMI, Guam, Palau, Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia. In her territory, she is the Chairperson of the State Planning Committee on the Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD). She has been appointed by the Board of Education to serve on the Special Education State Advisory Panel (SESAP), and appointed by the Governor to serve on the CNMI Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC).

She was part of the first cohort in the CNMI to complete the Zika Virus (ZIKV) Infection Interdisciplinary Training Program and served as the CNMI Training Director for this program through the CA-LEND.

Jennifer is currently working on her Master’s Degree in Education at Framingham State University, with an expected graduation date of December 2019.

"Program Assessment and Evaluation" Training by Dr. Hye-Jin Park from UH Manoa, at Kanoa Resort on May 23, 2019.
A Community Free of Stigma

Greg Borja, Program Manager-NMPASI

“People with mental health problems say that the social stigma attached to mental health and the discrimination they experience can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover.”

This is the opening line of an article from the Mental Health Foundation entitled Stigma and Discrimination. Although the organization operates in the United Kingdom, I believe that the statement also applies to residents in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

There are around 450 million people world-wide that have a mental health condition. These conditions range from Depression to Schizophrenia, and include substance use disorders. Each individual that experiences these conditions may have the ability to reach a path to recovery, in order to lead independent and productive lives within our community. A barrier faced by many when accessing the services that allow them to reach their full potential is Stigma.

Stigma as defined by Merriam-Webster is “a mark of shame or discredit.” Someone seeking treatment for a mental health condition, may be confronted by others that having such a condition is something to be ashamed about. This is far from the truth.

Most mental health conditions are a natural part of our lives, and may come about later in life as a result of reliving a negative experience, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When others make judgements about how we should be living, without sharing our experiences, can lead to discrimination.

Educing our community about the facts associated with mental health conditions is the first step that needs to be taken to address prejudice and negative behaviors brought about by others against those that could benefit from mental health treatment. Being an accepting member of our society, who sees people for who they are and not by their diagnosis is a goal I feel our community can reach. We can begin by using “People First Language”, identifying people as people and not their condition. Avoiding the use of stereotypical words that are used to describe people with mental health needs, like “Crazy”, “Psycho”, or “Kaduku” can help free people from feeling shame for a condition they developed and had no control over when diagnosed. Support those who seek treatment, whether medically or culturally.

Together as a society, we can lead our islands to become a community free of Stigma.

Disability Network Partners Attend Program Evaluation Workshop

(Press Release)

Saipan, CNMI – May 23, 2018 – The University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at the Northern Marianas College sponsored a training workshop on “Program Assessment and Evaluation” at Kanoa Resort on May 23, 2019. The workshop, taught by Dr. Hye-Jin Park, Pacific Basin University Centers for Excellence (PBUCE), University of Hawaii at Manoa, was offered in order to help build capacity in our community to effectively support individuals with disabilities and their families.

Program Evaluation systematically investigates the effectiveness of social intervention programs to help improve our current programs. It involves assessment of one or more of the following domains: (1) the need for the program, (2) the design of the program, (3) the program implementation and service delivery, (4) the program impact or outcomes, and (5) the program efficiency. There was a total of 34 participants, representing the following disability agencies/organizations: Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD), University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Center for Living Independently (CLI), Northern Marianas College (NMC), Commonwealth Office of Transit Authority (COTA), Commonwealth Respite Services Program (CRSP), Maternal Child and Health Bureau (MCHB), and the Tinian Chapter of VOICES of the CNMI (self-advocacy organization).

Participants were trained on the basics of program evaluation and worked in groups to evaluate their own program using a logic model. Each group presented its evaluation on an existing disability program and suggested steps for improvement.

Some comments by participants:

“Like classroom size, you can easily interact. Workshop is very organized. The outcome is very good, I have learned new method in evaluating program. Now, I can apply what I have learned.”

“Training was great. Alot of information was shared…”

“Thank you for training and abundant information to evaluate each of our individual programs.”

For more information, please email Interim UCEDD Director, Jennifer-Eilleen E. Castro at cnmi.ucedd@marianas.edu.
Name: MONIKA H. DIAZ  
VOICES Title: PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, TINIAN CHAPTER 
Born: Tinian, CNMI  
Employer: Dept. of Community & Cultural Affairs, Division of Youth Services, Tinian  
Occupation: 

Hafa adai, my name is Monika H. Diaz. I’m currently working at Division of Youth Services on Tinian. I graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Human Development and Family Sciences. I am the current President of the Very Outspoken Individuals Can Each Succeed (VOICES), for Tinian Chapter, Vice-president for Team Koka, a current board member for the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), Consumer Advisory Council (CAC) and I have also represented other boards in the past, for Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) and Special Education State Advisory Panel (SESAP). I enjoy helping my community and having a voice.

Name: ROBERT A. MENDIOLA  
VOICES Title: PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, ROTA CHAPTER & COMMISSIONER of the VOICES of the CNMI  
Born: Born on Guam, raised on Rota  
Employer: Rota Northern Marianas College  
Occupation: Computer Lab Assistant  

Hi, my name is Robert Mendiola. During my high school years, I had a hard time fitting in with my peers because I felt like an outcast but today, I turn my weakness to strength with public speaking. “Success is the best revenge”

Name: JAN BARCINAS  
VOICES Title: VICE-PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, TINIAN CHAPTER  
Born: Saipan & Raised on Tinian  
Employer: Tinian Mayor’s Office  
Occupation: Library Assistant  

Do you have a Disability? My disability is dysgraphia. It’s a learning disability.

During my elementary & high school years, the assistance that I needed was not always available. I had a very difficult time writing notes, focusing in class and reading. My parents were informed that I will never be able to read and write because of my disability. Until one day, we were invited to attend one of DD Council’s trainings on “Knowing Your Rights” and “Accommodation”. Because of DD Council’s training, we understood what our rights were and my parents were able to get the accommodation I needed in school. I was able to receive a laptop and a note taker. My mother was my voice and my strength to be what I am today. So I followed her foot step to become a teacher aid and to be a strong advocate just like her. I could never thank her enough for the man I am today.
**MEREDITH MORALES**

**VOICES Title**: SECRETARY, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER

**Born**: Saipan and reside in San Roque

**Employer**: Unemployed

**Title**: Proud Wife, mother and grandmother

Every year during the San Roque Fiesta, the community gathers and we help each other to prepare food, decorate and set the tables. I always help out to sell raffle tickets for the fiesta event. I am always active with the church activities.

**ESTELLA CABAOBAS**

**VOICES Title**: TREASURER, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER

**Born**: Saipan

**Employer**: Volunteers at Man’Amkos & CLI

**Occupation**: Volunteer

I got my disability from an accident when I was 7 years old. I was walking home from school when I got hit by a car. I am taking medicine for the rest of my life to control my seizure. But even with my disability, I have three boys ages 36, 28, & 25. I am also able to enjoy life by being a member of the State Independent Living Center (SILC), Secretary for DD Council Board, Treasurer for the VOICES of the CNMI, Saipan Chapter, and former Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) at NMC-UCEDD. I am currently a member and a volunteer for the Center for Living Independently (CLI). I was also a volunteer at the Office on Aging Program. My goal is to find a job.

**MEREDITH MORALES**

**VOICES Title**: SECRETARY, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER

**Born**: Saipan and reside in San Roque

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**ELSIE SONGAO**

**VOICES Title**: MEMBER, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER

**Born**: Saipan

**Employer**: Unemployed

**Occupation**: None

I have a disability called Cerebral Palsy since I was born. I am currently a member for the VOICES of the CNMI, Saipan Chapter and a board member for the CNMI Council on Developmental Disability. I graduated 12th grade at Marianas High School 1996. During my senior year I was doing cooperative education at the Clerk of Court as a clerk and also trained at Pacific Islands Club as housekeeping. After graduation from high school, I worked at the Department of Labor as a clerk for 6 months and San Antonio Elementary School as a clerk for six months too under the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Program. I was a former member for the Center for Living Independently for 3 months. My goal is to find a job.

**SCOTTIE SECHARRAIMUL**

**VOICES Title**: MEMBER, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER

**Born**: Saipan and reside in San Antonio

**Employer**: Pacific Islands Club

**Title**: Helper

My name is Sutheera and I have a son, Scottie who has a disability. He is unable to communicate, write and to live independently. I am seeking guidance to help my son with daily living skills, ways to communicate and how to help me accept my son to become independent. I am looking for families who can help me with the same situation for advice or techniques that you can share to help my son.

If you wish to contact me, please email me at: skyler.secharraimul670@gmail.com
A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW OVR DIRECTOR

Hafa Adai and Tirow,

It is my pleasure to announce to you that I have recently joined the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) as their new Director. Please allow me to introduce myself to you. My name is Maryann Borja-Arriola, the newest member of OVR, and I bring with me years of experience working with federal programs. My diversified experiences include working as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Grant Writer, Zoning Planner, Public School System Elementary School Teacher, and Grants Manager for the CNMI Office of the Governor-Office of Grants Management & State Clearinghouse.

OVR is well known in the community for its strong commitment to providing quality services to people with disabilities within the CNMI. The Program has built a solid reputation in the Vocational Rehabilitation field and has been providing services to the people of the CNMI since 1975. Some of the outstanding services provided include job trainings, job development, assistive technology devices, transportation services, as well as independent living services. We believe in expanding employment opportunities for eligible applicants who choose to go to work, and our role is to ensure the needed supports are in place to make citizens with disabilities professionally successful. I consider myself fortunate to have been given the opportunity to join this fine agency and my commitment to you all is to ensure that we continue to bring these first rate service to the community.

With great enthusiasm, I am looking forward to the experience of delivering our best in Vocational Rehabilitation services to the CNMI. I am eager to work with our grantors, consumers and partners to enhance the lives of more people with disabilities throughout the CNMI.

Sincerely,

VR Director
The Center for Living Independently in the CNMI

Fun and Games for the CLI consumers At the 2nd annual CNMI DisAbility Sports Festival

CLI_CNMI mini Workshop at PIC

CLI consumers working in our beautiful farm to table garden

Thank you to NMTI for our beautiful, strong Picnic table and SNILD for the new dining table built by NMTI