

*In this issue*

**AUCD and New UCEED Director** ..... Page 1

**A Community Free of Stigma** ..... Page 3

**Disability Network Partners Attend Program Evaluation Workshop** ..... Page 3

**VOICES** ..... Page 4

**A Message from the New OVR Director** ..... Page 6

**OVR & Partners: Photo Collage** ..... Page 7

**Center for Living Independently in the CNMI** ..... Page 8

# AUCD and New UCEDD Director

The 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;

**Eric Kurtz**, UCEDD Director, University of South Dakota  
**Jennifer-Eileen E. Castro**, Northern Marianas College

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

*In the photo are: L-R (Eric Kurtz, Joanne Siegel, Andy Imparato, Susan Fox, Rylin Rodgers, Cindy Thomas, Derrick Willis, Jennifer-Eileen Castro); Front (John Tschida)*



## 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.



# 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.

Educating 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. A lot 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-Eileen E. Castro at [cnmi.ucedd@marianas.edu](mailto:cnmi.ucedd@marianas.edu).

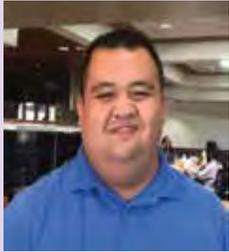


# VOICES OF THE CNMI

## Saipan, Tinian & Rota Chapters

### Officers and Members

P.O. Box 502565  
Saipan, MP 96950



**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  
**Status** : Single  
**Education** : High School diploma & working towards BA  
**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** : FELIX ULLOA, JR.  
**VOICES Title** : VICE-PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, **ROTA CHAPTER**  
**Born** : Rota, CNMI  
**Status** : Single  
**Employer** : Unemployed  
**Occupation** : None

*I have a disability since year 2006. I was born on Rota and raised on Saipan. I attended public elementary from 1st to 5th grade in Rota, then moved to Saipan and continued my education from 6th to 11th grade, then moved to Rota and attended Rota High School from 11th to 12 grade. I graduated at Rota High School on 2005. I was the former president for the VCNMI, Rota Chapter and I am currently the Vice President for the VOICES of the CNMI, Rota Chapter and board member for the CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities. After graduating from high school I worked at the Rota Municipal Council Office as Office Clerk under the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Program for six months. I attended 2 semesters at the Northern Marianas College to get my Associate Degree, but due to dad being constantly sick, I needed to withdraw and put my future on hold. So my goal now is to find me a job, but, because of lack of public transportation in Rota I am not able to pursue my goal. I will like to see that the public transportation in Rota be available so that the people of Rota that don't have transportation can avail to the program.*



**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** : JAN BARCINAS  
**VOICES Title** : VICE-PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, **TINIAN CHAPTER**  
**Born** : Saipan & Raised on Tinian  
**Status** : Single  
**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.*



**Name** : EFREN SABLAN NICHOLAS  
**VOICES Title** : PRESIDENT, VOICES of the CNMI, SAIPAN CHAPTER  
**DOB** : April 29, 1993  
**Employer** : Unemployed  
**Occupation** : None

*I grew up under the Autism Spectrum Disorder on a mild scale when I was three years old. I also grew up with the support of three older brothers, my friends and last but not least my mother and father. I graduated from Mount Carmel High School and Northern Marianas College with an Associate's in Computer Application and a Bachelor's in Business Management with the support of Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. I am currently the Chairman of the CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities and grateful to not only OVR but also my families and friends that supported me. Thanks to VOICES, I learned about self-advocacy and ways to improve the CNMI to make it friendlier to people with disabilities. My advice to people with disabilities is to never forget yourself and turn your disability to an ability that helps those around you.*



**Name** : 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.*



**Name** : 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.*



**Name** : 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.*



**Name** : 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 Sutteera 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maryann Borja-Arriola".

VR Director

# OVR & PARTNERS



# The Center for Living Independently in the CNMI

*Fun and Games for the CLI consumers  
At the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual CNMI Dis Ability  
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*

