



THE CNMI DESIGNATED PROTECTION & ADVOCACY SYSTEM:

Providing legally - based advocacy services on behalf of individuals with disabilities and their families

Advancing the understanding of and appreciation for P&A services and disability related issues

Enhancing the quality of P&A services and efficiency of the organizations operations

Posse

Charging through Barriers of Discrimination

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 5

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- INTERNATIONAL DAY OF - PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



By: **JOHN CABRERA**
Client Advocate

Proclaimed by the United Nations in 1992 “International Day of People with Disabilities” and later changed in 2008 to “International Day of Persons with Disabilities” (IDPwD) is annually held on December 3rd. It is a day dedicated to raise awareness and recognize the experiences of people with disabilities for their individuality, contributions and rights around the world. The day involves all people with physical and/or intellectual disabilities. The day consists of informative events and/or functions that bring attention to the challenges they face to be included in all aspects of life,

not limited to work and access to healthcare services and/or providers. Nearly one billion people of the total population i.e., 7 billion or approximately 15% of the world’s population. This is considered to be the world’s largest minority group because of the lack of services available. People with disabilities typically have weak health and less economic chances compared to those with abled bodies. The (IDPwD) also aims to stop the stigma and eliminate ignorance about individuals with disabilities. With ADA rights and laws in place and in practice, the administrations are retaining the top policies to guarantee that individuals with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities.

I, as a person with a physical disability, am grateful to know that every year on December 3rd will be a day to reflect and commemorate on how far people with disabilities have come to be included in and recognized for their contributions, unique barriers and abilities. Today we have almost all types of disability-inclusive events. The Paralympics is a good example of recognition and inclusion. People with physical/intellectual disabilities around the world from counties all come together to compete and celebrate sports for individuals who are physically/or mentally challenged. This year’s theme is “Fighting for rights in the post-COVID era.” With many organizations, both globally and locally being inclusive is a step in the right direction for all persons with disabilities.

For more information contact NMPASI at (670) 235-7273/4 or visit us on the web at www.nmpasi.org, www.facebook.com/NMPASI, and follow us on Instagram @nmpasi670.



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2021 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Recap



By: **TIAVA TO'OMATA**
Program Aide

This year's NDEAM celebrations were full of diversity, inclusivity and, for me personally, humility. The CNMI Disability Network Partners (DNP), an organization that NMPASI is a proud member of, hosted the 2021 NDEAM Employer Recognition Ceremony on October 1st, 2021 at the Royal Taga Hall, World Resort. During the ceremony, the CNMI Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) recognized all the employers who have hired and/or trained individuals with disabilities in the past fiscal year. Additionally, NMPASI was able to provide education and training for the "Employer and Self-Advocates Presentations" in Rota, where various employers, advocates, family members and interested community members were present. This highlighted all the available resources that the DNPs can provide as support for individuals with disabilities.

Although this year's celebrations weren't as spectacular as others, I feel it's safe to say that we were glad to have at least a little something. It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic

greatly affected on our already-suffering economy, with many businesses and agencies, small and large, cutting back on costs, furloughing employees, and unfortunately, even shutting down. Thankfully, through much faith and resilience from our community, we have been in the process of recovery. This year's NDEAM theme is "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion." The CNMI's recovery is, likewise, powered by inclusion. Inclusion is not just culturally rooted, but rather, diversified by all walks of life in this community of ours. This is our indigenous people, our international folks, our young, our old and yes, our people with disabilities.

One month of the year is not enough to recognize our employers for believing that people with disabilities are not looked at for what they can't do, but for what they can do. So, with that, we say thank you, employers, for focusing on one's abilities and strengths as qualified employees. The awardees of this year were from both the private and public sectors of our community: Pepoy's Café & Restaurant, Herman's Modern Bakery, No Ka Oi Termites, Taro Sue Corporation, Department of Lands and Natural Resources – Division of Agriculture, Garapan Elementary School, Public School System – Office of the Commissioner of Education, Triple J Five Star Whole Foods, Sun Palace Hotel, Office of the Governor, Center for Living

Independently in the CNMI, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Finance – Revenue & Taxation, Delta Management, Department of Community & Cultural Affairs – Historic Preservation Office. Garapan Public Market, Kinpachi Restaurant, Dong A. Corporation, Island Café & Restaurant, Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation and the Maternal Child Health Bureau. Thank you for opening your doors, breaking down barriers, and for being role-model businesses for everyone else to follow.

It is a privilege being able to witness and honor all who have continuously shown their allegiance of being inclusive in their workplace by hiring and training individuals with disabilities. The experience that I've been gaining in my short, yet continuous, tenure of working in this ever-evolving field is one of its own kind. Grateful is not enough to describe this, but perhaps humbled is close. Witnessing these real-life advocates, employers, employees and all who have a stake in being the reason for inclusivity in the workplace is far beyond anything the movies and TV shows can teach you. We have gone a long way from where we've started as a community and I can't help but hope for more in the coming years!

#Accessibility



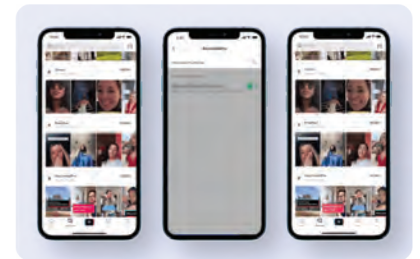
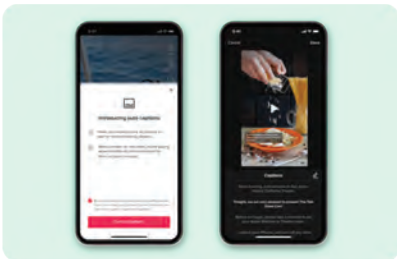
By: **SHARLEEN SABLAN**
Projects Specialist

You would be hard-pressed to find someone who has not heard of the social media phenomenon that is TikTok. For those not familiar, TikTok is a video-focused social networking application (app) where content-creators share a 15-second to 3-minute video. TikTok is known for viral trends, often involving dance moves. During the pandemic lockdowns last year, many people downloaded the app to keep busy. It was easy to go down what my friends and I call a TikTok rabbit hole and spend hours scrolling through the latest dance moves, challenges and trends. With so much time on our hands, it wasn't long before everyone got to "whoa-ing" (a popular dance trend at the height of TikTok's US popularity). With TikTok blowing up for people all across American and other countries, it's not a surprise that big names got in on it. Celebrities, large corporations, name brands, professional sports... they got into hefty interactions with each other and creators with newfound TikTok fame.

Let's take a second to talk about the remarkable and sometimes menacing (cue the eerie music) ALGORITHM. Many in the tech world have lauded TikTok's algorithm as one of the more intuitive and effective of its kind. There is even a controversial theory on shadowbanning. We won't get into that today. Right now, I'd like to focus on how the algorithm puts together a For You page (FYP - the first page you land on/your feed) that can push you deep into the subcultures of TikTok to help you find the niches and spaces where you'll be most entertained, find your passions and feel right at home with an online community curated to your interests. The app also, like other social media platforms, uses hashtags to subcategorize content. You can find Learn on TikTok, TikTok Cooks, ASL (American Sign Language) and Disability Rights. Personally, my FYP is a mixture of foodies, dance trends, day-in-the-life of individuals with disabilities, TikTok tutorials (yes, tutorials on how to use TikTok), disability rights advocacy and even Book Tok. (Admittedly, I think the algorithm missed the mark for me on Book Tok but I've been rolling with it. Welp. Come to think of it, I guess the algorithm was right all along. Sheesh!)

The pandemic also brought on a rejuvenation of sensitivity to mental health issues, thus highlighting other issues such as disabilities and disability rights, indigenous peoples and indigenous rights and of course social movements like Black Lives Matter. With the algorithm matching users and content and the added focus on inclusion, there was also a surge in the collective agreement that accessible content is good content. TikTok even put out a guide to making accessible social media posts, that includes universal design for posts on their Accessibility Page.

I came across a couple of great articles online ("Social Media Accessibility Tips & Tricks: TikTok" by Cameron Moore and "TikTok Accessibility: Make Your Content More Inclusive" by Natalie Endres) Here are some tips on what makes accessible content:



1.Add captions: Captions are the easiest way to make your content more accessible. Adding text to your audio will greatly increase your video reach and inclusivity. Those with hearing impairments or other disabilities will then be able to fully experience TikTok.

2.Photosensitive epilepsy toggle & warning: This allows users to opt-out of videos that may be sensitive or dangerous to those with photosensitive epilepsy or those who suffer from light-induced migraines. Creators will also receive warning labels for effects that may cause these issues.

3.Animated thumbnails: Users who might be sensitive to flashing images can choose from animated or static video images.



4.Text-to-speech: This will enable text that appears in videos to be converted into speech, often imitative of the human voice.

Article continues on following page

MATTHEW WALZER

and the letter of Hope and Inspiration



By: **LUIS MACARANAS**
Projects Specialist

In 2012, Mathew wrote an open letter to Nike telling them that it was his dream to go to college without the worry of someone having to tie his shoe, and asking for a shoe that everyone could put on regardless of physical ability. He wrote the letter not just for himself, but also for other people with a disability who faced similar challenges.



Mathew's letter inspired Tobie Hatfield, Nike athletes' projects innovator, to create a shoe that would address his specific need. Within the same year of the letter, Nike delivered a Hatfield design to Mathew for wear testing. It was a no lace shoe with a zipper that had Mathew's last name on the zipper tab. Mr. Hatfield continued working on ways to help others with special needs. Then on 2015 the development of Nike FlyEase a no-lace footwear was launched. The latest model which is Nike Go FlyEase, a no lace, hand-free footwear, was released in March of this year.

Mathew was able to fulfill his dream of going to college and graduated with a management degree in 2018. Within his college years he was invited to speak on a panel at The White House about designing apparel and assistive technology for people with special needs. He also was able to share his story on many multimedia platforms such as "The Drew Barrymore Show", Spotify and Yahoo. His advocacy led him to opportunities to speak on United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles, Runway of Dreams, and ARC.

Mathew letter is still making an impact today. Mathew said "I look at that letter as a symbol of hope and inspiration for people, doesn't matter if you have a disability or what background you come from. It shows the power that a person's mind and voice and heart can have on changing the world."

Mathew will always be advocating for change for people with disabilities, and his letter is evident that it still providing Hope and Inspiration till this day to everyone regardless of their ability.

If you would like more information about the letter of Hope and Inspiration and adaptive footwear, contact the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc (NMPASI) at 235-7273 or visit us online at www.nmpasi.org.



5. **Video descriptions:** Text-based video descriptions can either appear within captioning or in linked comments. Things to describe include:

- Basic descriptions of any people, animals, or objects that appear in the video
- Descriptions of movement or dance moves
- Relevant facial expressions
- Any lighting or animation effects used
- Transcriptions of on-screen text

#Accessibility (continued)



6. **Formatting:** Format content in a way that adheres to accessibility best practices. Appropriate color contrast, font size, style, and text placement can make all the difference.

- Color contrast: Black font with light or white-colored background works.
- Font: Large and San Serif font to help visual impairment.
- Text Placement: Place your text at the top or middle of the video for it to be easily viewed. It will also prevent your text from being blocked by the menu bar.

THE BATTLE WITHIN



By: **SHANIAH ALVAREZ**
Client Advocate

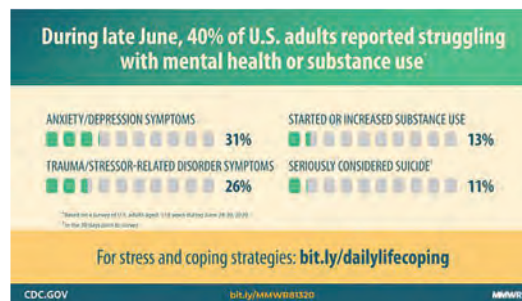
Mental health and suicide are important topics to address, but they are still considered “taboo” topics in the Mariana Islands. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many families and individuals. During the pandemic, many individuals have had to quarantine or isolate themselves from and human contact. This can take a toll on an individual’s mental health, especially if they have pre-existing mental health issues. It is easy for an individual to experience depression or anxiety from the pandemic and on top of that, from quarantine and isolation.



For many people from the islands, suicide and mental health are still seen as weaknesses, and it makes it difficult for individuals to speak up about what they are feeling, let alone seek help, like

individual therapy or counseling. It is extremely important to address these two topics and how they not only affect the individual, but their loved ones as well. It is also important to recognize that during quarantine and isolation, an individual can feel even more alone than they already do. People have reportedly experienced more mental health issues along with suicide ideation during the pandemic, and suicide ideation is shown to be more prevalent amongst males within a younger age group: 18-24.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>.



In many ways, culture affects the mindset and perspective of an individual because it is shown that men are more commonly expected to be more masculine, strong, and not to share their emotions or struggles. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6142169/>.

It is vital to follow more protocols when checking on the people in quarantine. Supposedly, there are therapists that are there to follow-up with the individuals in quarantine to evaluate their mental health and well-being. It seems that the essential

workers may be overwhelmed with the number of individuals testing positive and going into the quarantine facilities, and this is understandable. This just also means that there is a need for more training and awareness, so they can be more helpful to those in quarantine. There has to be some change because suicide is a real matter that has happened at a quarantine site already here in the Northern Mariana Islands. <https://www-saipantribune.com/index.php/man-dies-in-quarantine/>. Why is it so common in the islands when it comes to suicide? Individuals who experience these mental health issues could already be facing some internal battles with depression or some other kind of mental health issue. It is common for these individuals not to talk about it because their family and friends may not even know what they are going through, and it goes back to the culture as well.

Be kind to people because, there is no way of knowing what they are going through and what kind of mental health issues and battles they are internalizing. For more information or if you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal ideations, please call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or here are some local resources that provide counseling services, therapy, and/or help to overcome suicidal ideations and more: Community Guidance Center at 670-323-6560, Systems of Care at 670-664-4604, or Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Program at 670-664-LIFE (5433).

#Accessibility (continued)

People with disabilities navigate through this world at a different capacity. People with disabilities walk, talk, see, do and learn in different ways. Accessibility isn't just ramps and parking spots. It's not just subtitles and screen readers. It's more than just being aware of Autism or Cerebral Palsy. Accessibility is meeting each individual where they are. When people start and consistently keep shifting toward a culture of inclusiveness and accessibility as the new norm, we embrace and celebrate it. Disability rights have come a long way over the years. It's beautiful to see that we're getting to a point where accessibility is not only considered but celebrated. When we can, with confidence, say that this world is accessible, we have an equal chance at enjoying all that it has to offer.

If you or someone you know is in need of Assistive Technology (AT) and are eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Medicaid, Medicare, IDEA or Section 504, contact the Protection & Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT) program at the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) at 670-235-7273/4 or visit us on the web at www.nmpasi.org, www.facebook.com/NMPASI, and follow us on Instagram @nmpasi670.

"Social Media Accessibility Tips & Tricks: TikTok" by Cameron Moore can be found at: <https://abilitytools.org/blog/social-media-accessibility-tips-tricks-tiktok/>

"TikTok Accessibility: Make Your Content More Inclusive" by Natalie Endres can be found at: <https://cielo24.com/2020/10/tiktok-accessibility-make-your-content-more-inclusive/>

The TikTok Accessibility Page can be found at: <https://www.tiktok.com/accessibility/>.

THE OTHER OLYMPICS



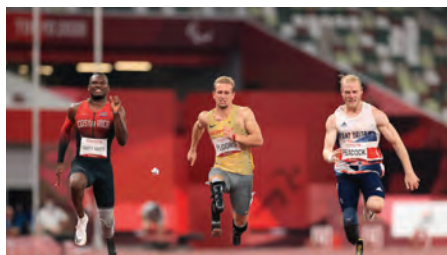
By: **GREG BORJA**
Program Manager

Back in July and August of this year, the 32nd Summer Olympic Games took place in Tokyo, Japan (after having been postponed a full year due to the ongoing pandemic). The games featured the world's greatest athletes pitted in competition to see which nation would emerge victors in a variety of sports. I am a big fan of the Olympics and was impressed to see the newer Olympic sports being broadcast that I was aware were a part of the games.



What also may not be known to many is that since 1960 the Olympic Games are followed by the Paralympic Games. These games celebrate athletes with disabilities who qualify based on 10 categories, ranging from Impaired muscle power, such as limitations as a result of post-polio syndrome, Impaired passive range of motion, Loss of limb or limb deficiency, Leg-length Difference, Short stature, Visual Impairments that range from legally blind to total blindness, and Intellectual disabilities. Beginning in 2001, the Paralympics have taken place in the same city that hosts the Olympics Games.

Paralympic Athletes compete in several sports and events that mirror their Olympic counterparts. During the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, world records were smashed in many of these events. In swimming alone, 69 world records were broken by athletes from Canada, China, and the United States, just to name a few. In Athletics, records were broken in nearly every track event for both men and women. Powerlifting showcased 60 athletes representing 26 countries. The list goes on and on.



I was able to take the opportunity to watch many of the events during the 2020 Paralympics, and I was in awe of the pure talent the competitors displayed in each of their respective sports. It brought to mind the old saying, "Never judge a book by its cover," as these individuals showed more heart and determination than I have in the past 15 years of struggling to stay in shape.

Another take away I had from watching the Paralympics was the information I received about the efforts made by the Japanese government to ensure their city of Tokyo was accessible to the needs of athletes with disabilities. Accessible features like ramps, automatic doors, and audible crosswalks were installed through the city to allow athletes to enjoy themselves once they were done competing.

Similar to the athletes who participated in Paralympic Games, there are other people with disabilities throughout our community, our nation, and the world whose talents are often overlooked as a result of their disability. In the United States, including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, there are laws in place that protect people with disabilities from discrimination on the basis of their disability, whether this be in seeking and/or maintaining employment or in access to public and private goods and services.

In keeping with the spirit of the Paralympic Games, I invite our community to celebrate the strengths of people with disabilities living in our islands and to provide assistance when requested to accommodate their limitations.

2021, A Difficult Year



By: **JEANNE RAYPHAND**
Legal Counsel

The year of 2021 has been difficult in many ways for many people. But for a moment, let's put aside all the negative effects of politics and the pandemic and focus instead on some of the **positive** and **exciting** events involving people with disabilities.



1. On November 9, 2021, a deaf high school football team - the varsity football team of the California School of the Deaf in Riverside, California - defeated the Desert Christian Knights in the second round of playoffs. See <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/29/us/deaf-high-school-football-riverside-california/index.html>



2. An 18-year-old teen math whiz with a genetic condition known as spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) - for which he needs practical health care from others about 60% of his waking hours - was accepted to Harvard, MIT and Caltech. See Team Math Whiz With Incapacity Accepted to Harvard, MIT and Caltech/DISABILITY LAW (June 8, 2021).

3. Rhode Island was the first state to allow harm reduction centers for safe and supervised drug consumption. *Psychiatric Times* (June 10, 2021).



4. Effective January 1, 2021, FAS citizens living in the CNMI became eligible for Medicaid. See Northern Mariana Islands/Medicaid.gov.



5. In August 2021, an agreement was reached between the United States and Brown University to resolve allegations that the University discriminated against students with mental health disabilities. The settlement agreement requires the University to revise undergraduate leave policies, reasonably modify its policies for undergraduate students with mental health disabilities seeking to return from medical leave, train faculty and staff on the ADA, and pay \$684,000 to compensate aggrieved students. @ Enforcement Activities - ADA.gov.

While there are no doubt many other instances of enlightening and positive developments throughout 2021, the question then becomes: what's next? What are we going to do in the upcoming year to make positive changes and move forward?

Here are some ideas to consider:

1. Assist parents in creating forever homes for their children with autism, mental illnesses, or developmental disabilities
2. Provide funding and establish facilities/programs/whatever it takes to provide long-term personal care for persons unable to care for themselves
3. Provide funding to establish and provide educational and vocational training, whether by internet or face-to-face, to persons incarcerated in the Department of Corrections
4. Provide funding to establish a peer-run respite for persons experiencing mental illness, homelessness, or domestic violence
5. Create non-police crisis response to incidents involving persons with mental illness
6. Allow cannabis for inmates in the Department of Corrections to address issues of pain, anxiety, ADHD, or other mental health issues
7. Support athletes preparing to compete in upcoming Pacific Mini-Games
8. VOTE!!! SPEAK UP!!! VOLUNTEER!!! And take action (legal, peaceful action) to correct and/or improve our community.

NMPASI



NORTHERN MARIANAS PROTECTION & ADVOCACY SYSTEMS, INC. (NMPASI)

*The CNMI's designated organization to
protect the civil, legal & human rights of
people with disabilities*



NMPASI, a local non-profit organization, administers grant programs from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)/Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), and the Human Resources Services Administration (HRSA), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE)/Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), and the Social Security Administration (SSA).



PAIMI – Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness

Must have a mental illness with an alleged rights violation.



PADD – Protection & Advocacy for Developmental Disabilities

Must have three functional limitations with a disability manifested prior to the age of 22 with an alleged rights violation.



PAAT – Protection & Advocacy for Assistive Technology

Must have a need for Assistive Technology (AT) and eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Medicaid, Medicare, IDEA or Section 504.



PAIR – Protection & Advocacy for Individual Rights

Must have a physical or mental disability with an alleged rights violation.



PATBI – Protection & Advocacy for Traumatic Brain Injury

Must have a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) with an alleged rights violation.



PABSS – Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security

Must be a beneficiary of SSI/SSDI and seeking employment with alleged rights violation.



CAP – Client Assistance Program

Must be applying for or receiving VR Services and disputing VR decisions or actions.



SPBRP – Strengthening Protection for Beneficiaries with Representative Payees

Must be a beneficiary of Social Security with a Rep Payee and alleging misuse of benefits.



For more information:



670-235-7273/4



www.nmpasi.org

**Northern Marianas Protection &
Advocacy System, Inc**

P.O. Box 503529
Saipan, MP 96950

Phone: 670-235-7273/4
Fax: 670-235-7275

“To protect the civil, legal, and human rights of individuals with disabilities”