



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

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Charging through Barriers of Discrimination

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 7

APRIL - JUNE 2022

VOTING RIGHTS



By: **JEANNE RAYPHAND**
Legal Counsel

As we look forward to November elections, issues are being raised regarding who is eligible to vote here in the CNMI and who is disqualified from voting.

ARTICLE VII of the Commonwealth Constitution states:

Section 1: Qualifications of Voters. A person is eligible to vote who, on the date of the election, is eighteen years of age or older, is domiciled in the Commonwealth, is a resident of the Commonwealth and has resided in the Commonwealth for a period of time provided bylaw, is not serving a

sentence for a felony, has not been found by a court to be of unsound mind, and is either a citizen or national of the United States. The legislature may require that persons eligible to vote be citizens of the United States.

Section 2. Prohibition of Literacy Requirement. A person may not be denied the right to vote because that person is unable to read or write.

Section 3. Domicile and Residence. . . .

See also 1 CMC § 6201.

Issues seem to arise when someone is or has been in jail, or when someone is perceived to be mentally limited or when a person is unable to read or write. However, just because someone has been in jail or appears incompetent or cannot read or write does not disqualify a person from voting. Our CNMI Constitution protects the right to vote, and disqualification is limited and specific.

Persons "serving a sentence for a felony" includes persons on parole or probation or under a suspended sentence after conviction of a felony. "The disqualification, however, ends when the person has served the sentence or the suspension, probation or parole has expired . . . and also ends with the grant of a pardon." Analysis of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, art. VII, § 1, p. 123 (Dec. 6, 1976). Note that this section refers to a felony conviction, not a misdemeanor conviction.

Disqualification for persons found to be of unsound mind by a court includes "determination of insanity by criminal courts, determinations of unsound mind in civil commitment proceedings and determinations of unsound mind in any other kind of court proceeding." Analysis of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, art. VII, §1, p. 124 (Dec. 6, 1976)

The prohibition of literacy requirement "prohibits the use of any literacy test as a qualification to vote . . . [and] applies to any requirements that a person demonstrate an ability to speak, read or write any language, including English, Chamorro and Carolinian . . . [and] prohibits any kind of educational requirements for voter eligibility." Analysis of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, art. VII, § 2, p.124 (Dec. 6, 1976).

Voting is a right and one of the most important civic responsibilities of citizens of the United States. REGISTER AND VOTE!

If you are a person with disabilities and are having trouble or being denied the right to register and vote, contact NMPASI at (670) 235-7273/4 or www.nmpasi.org.



This publication is made using Federal funds from the US Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), the US Department of Education (DOE), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The views set forth are from the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the DHHS, DOE, SAMHSA/CMHS, or SSA.

TRANSITION PLANS: Local Resources for Students



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

The preparation for any type of transition can be daunting. Whether it be transitioning from different locations, to different homes and different friends—the task itself is one that should not be completed alone. Here in the CNMI, we are able to tap into a variety of local resources that can help your child, especially children with disabilities, complete the daunting task of transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, workforce and/or independent living. These available programs are here to provide technical support and assistance to ensure a smooth, safe and viable transition plan for students who qualify.

One of these programs is the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program under the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). This program seeks to provide services to help students who want to work to become prepared for life after high school and have meaningful careers through training, continuing education, or finding a job through various activities. Its ultimate goal is to help students transition to be career and/or college-ready. Depending on your child's interest, the Pre-ETS program can map out an individualized plan for the various options of transition. Options include preparing your child for college at

the Northern Marianas College, where disability-centered programs and services are likewise offered for enrolled students under the Disability Support Services (DSS) office; preparing your child for trades/technical institution at the Northern Marianas Technical Institute (NMTI); and/or preparing your child for the workforce through work experience and job trainings. For those interested in applying, you can call OVR at (670) 322-6537/8 for more information.

It is likewise important to note that college or the workforce may not be for everyone. Others may want to take some time before taking a step towards that direction, or want to gain independent living skills beforehand. At the Center for Living Independently in the CNMI (CLI), their vision is to provide a comprehensive range of services which will enable our people with disabilities to live as independently as they choose within the community and their mission is to ensure the rights of people with disabilities to live independently and fully integrated within the community. Through a plan with CLI, eligible consumers can map out the skills they would like to acquire from the center. These skills include, but are not limited to, cooking, cleaning and gardening. CLI also offers services for high school transition to post-secondary education, workforce trainings and self-advocacy trainings. For those interested in applying, you can contact CLI at (670) 322-4303/4 for more information.

The Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) advocates through the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for the rights of individuals with

disabilities to receive OVR services in order to main or obtain competitive employment. You should contact NMPASI if you are have applied for VR services and were denied, if you are dissatisfied with the VR services you are receiving, if your case is closed and you want to be reconsidered for services, and/or for additional questions or concerns relating to VR and the local independent living center. Our clients are our first and foremost priority. NMPASI provides a variety of programs and services that individuals with disabilities can avail of. These services include Direct Client Representation: investigating, negotiating, and/or mediating problems presented by individuals with disabilities who are eligible for Protection and Advocacy services and CAP services; Technical Assistance: we conduct American's with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) reviews for anyone in the CNMI; Training and Education: providing education and/or training for staff, governing boards, advisory councils, volunteers, service delivery professionals, constituency groups, and other members of the community; and Legal Services: Providing legal counsel and/or litigation services to persons and/or groups who are eligible for services.

NMPASI is the CNMI designated organization that protects the civil, legal, and human rights of people with disabilities. For more information on our programs and services, please contact NMPASI at our office numbers (670) 235-7273/4, text message (670) 287-0652, or visit our website at www.nmpasi.org.

APRIL IS *Autism* AWARENESS MONTH

As I interact with young parents with children with autism, I am inspired by their patience and dedication to working with professionals, doctors and service providers to provide the best possible help for their family and kids.

Autism by definition is a condition that affects how a person thinks, feels and interacts with others. It is a lifelong disability acquired since birth. Every person with Autism is different.



By: **JOHN CABRERA**
Client Advocate

According to the Center for Disease Control, autism affects 1 in 44 children in the USA today.

Early signs of autism are not responding to their names, avoiding eye contact, repetitive movements and many other behaviors on a spectrum. I came into contact with a 2-year-old boy who was fascinated by the tires on my wheelchair. He would always try to push me so that the tires turn and he would get so excited. I noticed he was always holding onto a toy car on one hand. His parents said he was into cars and tires. So, I let him do whatever he wanted to do with my wheelchair. It was fun to see him get excited over something so random as a wheelchair tire. I can only imagine the daily challenges faced by people with Autism. It is estimated that 25% to 50% of kids diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder never develop spoken language, making it difficult to communicate.

April 2022 is autism awareness month. This year's theme is "inclusion in the workplace: challenges and opportunities in a Post-Pandemic World." I have attended several Autism night and hot dog run events which raised awareness about Autism. All proceeds went to a good cause.

Please join me and celebrate Autism Awareness month in April as we recognize children, parents and individuals with Autism.

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](https://www.instagram.com/nmpasi670).



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO AUTISM



By: **LUIS MACARANAS**
Projects Specialist

Parents may agree to the fact that becoming a parent can be thrilling and exciting, and on the other hand fearful and frustrating. Whether picking the baby's name or considering what she or he will do in the future. Based on experience, I can say that everything I learned prior to becoming a parent got tossed to the side and I had to dive in straight and learn by experience. Having kids or babies that are diagnosed with autism can make parenting a little bit more worrisome. Autism or autism spectrum disorder refers to a broad range of conditions and characteristics involving challenges with social skills, repetitive behavior, speech and non-verbal communication. When a child is diagnosed with autism, parents frequently feel a range of uncomfortable emotions. With the aid of autismspeaks.org, we can better explore the response to the diagnosis, describe one's role as a parent, and build a stronger support network that will give parents a guide to autism.

Learning that your child has been diagnosed with autism is a very important moment in your life as well as the lives of your child and other family members. Family reaction to the diagnosis will be different depending on many factors. Whether you had an idea of the diagnosis or it seems to have been out of the blue, many parents experience shock when they hear the words "your child has autism." There is a time you might feel lonely. This feeling comes from a variety of sources when you experience a diagnosis. It's easy to feel overwhelmed about your child's future. If you accept your reaction and acknowledge your feelings, you will be able to move forward and begin advocating for your child.

Once your child is first diagnosed, you will likely find yourself fulfilling many roles. Care coordinator, therapist, parent, and teacher are the many hats you will wear. One of the many important roles you will have to do is advocating for your child. Avera Martin describes seven principles that can be applied to serve as an effective advocate your child.

1. **Take responsibility- Be a leader**
2. **Learn – Be an Expert**
3. **Think Critically- Be Discerning**
4. **Speak with Authority – Be Proactive**
5. **Document – Be Prepared**
6. **Collaborate – Be a Team Builder**
7. **Educate – Be a Voice for Your Child.**

Your support network is always there to assist. Whether you're an expert or just coming in this new world of autism, you will need support and help at many times in your journey. Keeping your marriage strong is vital to keep the lines of communication strong. Support for single parents may include coming to an agreement that involves the other parents, building a support network of friends and families, and taking time for yourself. Build and expand your support network because at the end of day the network will always be there during the times you need help the most.

Being a parent is never easy regardless of the ability. If your child has been diagnosed with autism, explore the diagnosis, describe your role as parents, and network for support are among many guides that you can use to navigate your family through this journey.

If you would like more information regarding A Parent's Guide to Autism or laws that protect people with autism, contact the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc (NMPASI) at 670 235-7273 or visit us online at www.nmpasi.org.



“ I LOST EVERYTHING ”



By: **CLEO NENING**
Program Coordinator

“I lost everything...however this trial ends. I lose in the end. I lost when these accusations were made public, they will stay with me forever. My life is forever ruined.” These were the words from Johnny Depp at court, while he was under oath, asking if he physically or sexually abused his partner at the time, Amber Heard.

As I found myself watching some of the clips of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard’s trial, it has opened the conversation that, yes, men’s mental health is real and, not only is it real, but it matters. The society we live in today has influenced many to believe that men don’t “have problems” and that men do not have mental health issues. Men are “supposed to be” strong for the family and hide all presence of weakness. All of these assumptions are FALSE. Perhaps, because of these assumptions, men go unnoticed and under looked in the topic of mental health.



Men are “supposed to be” strong for the family and hide all presence of weakness. All of these assumptions are FALSE. Perhaps, because of these assumptions, men go unnoticed and under looked in the topic of mental health.

May is proclaimed Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental Health America has posted that this year’s theme is “Back to Basics,” meaning that the goal of this theme is to provide foundational knowledge about mental health & mental health conditions and information about what people can do if their mental health is a cause for concern. Oftentimes, we need to simplify our

language and go back to the roots; back to the basics. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) under the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), since the outbreak of COVID-19, a link between large illness outbreaks and mental health disorders has been established. Between August 2020 and February 2021, the proportion of adults with unfulfilled psychiatric care requirements grew from 9.2% to 11.7%. The majority of these numbers occurred among those aged 18 to 29, and those with only a high school diploma. This increase shows that mental health does matter. It matters not just for women, but also for men.



The advocates of the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems Inc. (NMPASI) will be providing social media outreach regarding mental health. This include providing statistical data, verified information and tips from credible sources, personal experience, and both the local and national resources available to assist individuals who have mental illnesses or struggle with mental health. Our office has a specific program: Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) that caters towards alleged abuse, rights violations and discriminations against those who live with mental illnesses. Our office is mandated to provide protection and advocacy services and therefore, cannot provide all the required services that one with a mental illness may require, but fortunately so, we are interconnected

with other agencies and service providers that can possibly offer that type of assistance needed. Our community is small, yet, we still undergo the effects of unreported mental illnesses due to the surrounding cultural and social stigma that exists about disabilities and about mental health, in both men and women.

The case between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard demonstrates why men are so often forgotten about, not believed and not heard for the psychological and physical abuse they endure. Granted, this is still an ongoing case with no definite result as of the writing of this article, but I truly believe that with the substantial evidence and testimonies given, that I believe Johnny Depp. And maybe this is the first step we all need to take: believing. Believing that mental health is a reality in our community; believing that mental health exists in both men and women of all ages; and believing that we can all do our part in diminishing the stigma about mental health and individuals with disabilities.

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GETTING COMFORTABLE IN THE UNCOMFORTABLE



By: **SHANIAH ALVAREZ**
Client Advocate



I learned a new word today! Inextricable. It means inseparable or impossible to escape from. I learned this word while researching more about autism spectrum disorder. But, before I get to that, let me just share a quick backstory of how I first learned about people-first language. I graduated with my Social Work degree back in May of 2019, and in all my classes, with all my brilliant and amazing professors, the social work students were taught to use person-first/person-centered language. An example would be “a person who has a physical disability” rather than “a physically disabled person.” But back in April 2020, I was aware that it was Autism Awareness Month. And before I did anything to shed light on AAM, I did more research about Autism Spectrum Disorder, watched YouTube videos/interviews with autistic individuals, and read more articles surrounding the autistic community. This is when I

learned that many self-advocates (autistic individuals) in the autistic community and their close family/friends and allies prefer identity-first language/terminology such as saying “I’m autistic,” “she/he’s autistic,” or “autistic individual.”

So, going back to the start of my article, learning that new word, inextricable... According to an article by Autistic Hoya, these self-advocates understand that autism is an inherent part of their identity and an inextricable piece of their identity/personality. I know right? This totally contradicts everything I first learned (and still learn/do) in my college life, personal life, and work life. But I think it is important to note that different people will prefer different terms—and that’s okay. I remember tweeting about Autism Awareness Month/Day back in April 2020 to recognize and honor autistic individuals and using identity-first language because of what I read, watched, and learned while researching about autism spectrum disorder. I knew some people would assume that it is best to address an autistic individual by saying “individual with autism” because of how most professionals in these kinds of fields learn person-first language.

As I said, different folks will prefer different terms. I understand that being in a profession where you work closely with individuals with disabilities, you want to make sure that you are doing your due diligence and standing with all individuals with disabilities while promoting inclusion as much as possible. I think the best way to tackle this kind of “unsureness” is by simply just asking autistic individuals what they prefer. Research does show that the autism community mostly prefers identity-first language such as “autistic individual” or

“I’m autistic” and it is important to respect that. Although it can feel uncomfortable because of what is conditioned and taught to us in such professions, we must learn to get comfortable in the uncomfortable to continue advocating for individuals with disabilities. Learning and unlearning more ways to be the greatest allies/advocates we can be is the best thing we can do.

You can continue researching and reading more on:
<https://www.autisticchoya.com/2011/08/significance-of-seman-tics-person-first.html>
and
<https://www.centerforautismresearch.org/driven/%E2%80%9Cautistic-person%E2%80%9D-or-%E2%80%9Cperson-autism%E2%80%9D-one-more-correct#:~:text=That%20study%20found%20that%20,as%20the%20phrase%20they%20preferred.> Lastly, autistic individuals have rights in areas of employment, education, and access to services and Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc., (NMPASI) is the organization to contact should individuals be discriminated against or face barriers while attempting to access services. So, if you or anyone you know needs our service, please contact our office at 670-235-7273/4 or visit our website at www.nmpasi.org. Let us celebrate and empower all individuals who are on the spectrum! Happy Autism Awareness Month!



UNIQUELY HUMAN



By: **SHARLEEN SABLAN**
Projects Specialist

Autism is on the rise. Have you noticed? It's pretty common for most people to have had some sort of interaction with a person with autism. Sometimes the link is direct, like a parent who cares for a child with autism. Sometimes it's an acquaintance, like meeting a coworker's child with autism. No matter what the connection is, it seems like autism is just more present – because it is. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that back in the year 2000, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affected 1 in 150 children. Today, autism affects 1 in 44 children. What does that mean? It means that there is a significant number of adults with autism and an even larger number of children with autism who will grow up to be part of our communities. So, let's take a look at how we interact with people with autism.

The CDC defines ASD as a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. What does it mean to have significant social, communication and behavioral challenges? That part can be tricky to describe. Although there are common signs of ASD like avoiding eye contact, repetitive actions, or stimming, the overall variation and severity of these symptoms are innumerable. This is the reason autism is described as a spectrum. There's a saying by Dr. Stephen Shore that goes: "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism."

April is Autism Awareness Month. In the spirit of inclusion this month and every month, I encourage everyone to read the book "Uniquely Human" by Dr. Barry M. Prizant. This book looks at autism with the intention of understanding – not changing the individual. It talks about the different ways people with autism process the world and the variety of reasons they might do things that seem unusual to the rest of the world. It asks us to look at the reason a person with autism does what he does. It asks us to adjust the way we react instead of trying to change the person with autism.

Let's celebrate the many ways a person with autism is unique and embrace the new ways we can interact with persons with autism. Ask anyone whose lives have been touched by autism. They will tell you of all the great joys, the triumphs, and the endless love they find every day. They will say that, no matter how familiar or foreign the interaction with autism is, it is always worth it.

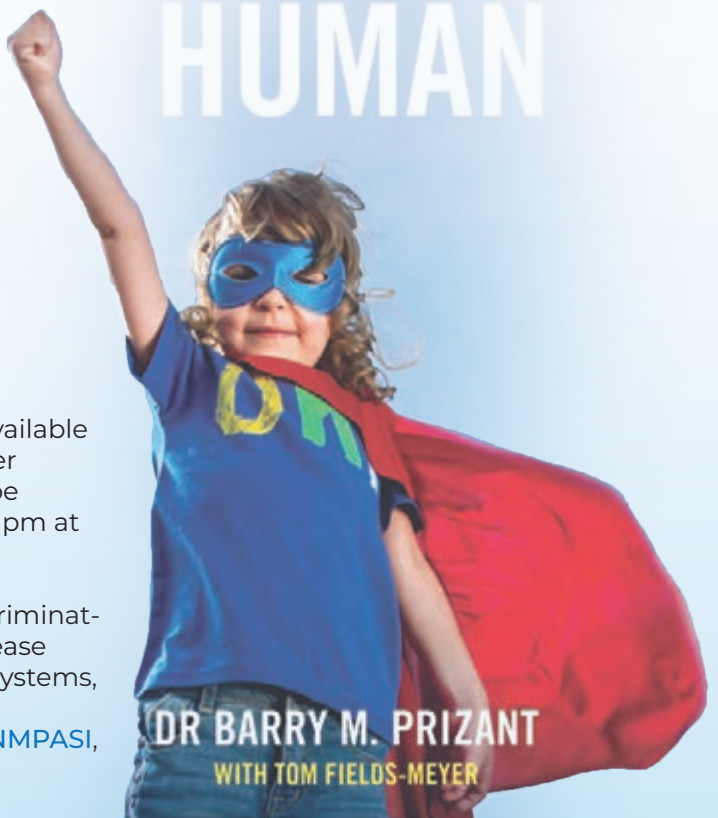
Scan here for "What is Autism Spectrum Disorder" from the CDC's website.



The book "Uniquely Human" by Dr. Barry M. Prizant is available for loan at the Family 2 Family Health Information Center located at Marianas Business Plaza, 5th floor. They can be contacted Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm at (670) 664-8700 or f2fhiccnmi@gmail.com.

If you feel that you or someone you know has been discriminated against because of a physical or mental disability, please contact the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) at 670-235-7273/4. Visit us on the web at www.nmpasi.org, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NMPASI, or on Instagram [@nmpasi670](https://www.instagram.com/nmpasi670).

UNIQUELY HUMAN



DR BARRY M. PRIZANT
WITH TOM FIELDS-MEYER

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT 32ND ANNIVERSARY



By: **GREG BORJA**
Executive Director

July 26, 2022, marks the 32nd Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA. The ADA National Network states: "the ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life. The purpose of the law is to make sure people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else." The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life: Employment, Public Services-State and Local Governments, Public Accommodations and Services operated by Private Entities, Telecommunications, and other Miscellaneous Provisions.

The Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. or NMPASI was established in 1993 and uses laws like the ADA to protect the civil, legal, and human rights of individuals with disabilities living in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Over the past few decades, NMPASI has worked to insure that people with disabilities in our islands are free from discrimination and continues to work to remove barriers to our community. In the ten years, NMPASI has assisted over 2,000 individuals with disabilities under protections of the ADA to have

equal access within our society. Below are a few examples of the work NMPASI does under the ADA:
NMPASI advocates once assisted an individual with a mental illness in getting gainful employment. The person was denied the opportunity to obtain a job because, the manager of the business went to school with the person and knew that in the past he was in Special Education. NMPASI advocates negotiated with the management of the business and stated that under the ADA, 1) as long as a person with a disability, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform the essential functions of the job, they should not face discrimination as result of a disability, and 2) according to the ADA a person is protected from discrimination in obtaining employment as a result of a disability, whether he has a mental or physical impairment that limits a major life activity, or has a record of such impairment. In the end, the advocates were able to assist the individual secure a job with the business.

Additionally, there are some individuals with disabilities that are unable to work as a result of their disability. There are benefits available for such people from the Social Security Administration or SSA. Social Security administers two programs that provide financial assistance to people with disabilities unable to work, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). When a person with a disability applies for these benefits and is denied, many do not know the process to request for a reconsideration. NMPASI advocates have assisted several

individuals in appealing their denials by helping them gather and organize records, submit documents, and accompany them to hearings. Once the process is completed some individuals have been awarded their benefits, and some have received back payments that went back years to the person's first application.

Finally, NMPASI encounters several individuals who experience barriers to access local businesses as a result of lack of Accessible Parking (the blue spaces). NMPASI advocates write letters to the businesses on our client's behalf and also provide technical assistance to the business on how the spaces need to follow the local and federal laws. Our ongoing task in regard to accessible Parking is getting a buy-in from our community of people without disabilities to leave these spaces open for people who need them and not use them because they are close to the entrance and convenient.

As we move forward into the coming years, we at NMPASI strive to make our islands accessible to all our people including people with disabilities. We are thankful for laws like the ADA and other civil rights laws that level the playing field for people with disabilities. After all, having a disability is a natural part of the human experience.
Biba ADA!



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