

NTC poised for new 'Voc' era

GIFF JOHNSON

Marie Maddison winds up seven years at the helm of the National Training Council this month, leaving with plans in place for expanded technical and vocational education training (TVET) in the Marshall Islands.

When she started with NTC in 2005, there were no vocational training programs aside from the Waan Aelon in Majel (Canoes of the Marshall Islands) program. The focus from the start was developing vocational training resources and partnerships with agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) that could manage vocational trainings, she said.

"Over the years, we tried to use the College of the Marshall Islands and the University of the South Pacific because they are both accredited institutions, and then work gradually with other trainers, including WAM, Youth to Youth in Health and others," she said.

NTC has funded a range of technical programs including sewing trainings



Marie Maddison



The National Training Council funds many NGO-sponsored vocational training programs, including this Waan Aelon in Majel carpentry program.

run by NGOs Juren Ae and Rukjenleen, handicraft programs run by Juren Ae and USP, the Toolbox program run by CMI, on the job training of existing workers by Kwajalein Range Services, and most recently the Jitok Kabeel plumbing, electrical and automotive training involving Public Works, the

ROC government and CMI. Because of the high drop out rate and equally high unemployment rate, NTC is focusing its job training support on the 16-to-24 age group.

The challenge in recent years for Maddison and NTC has been to get a grip on an area of education that

has been largely neglected in the recent past and was not connected to private sector needs.

"We are getting things in place and are now ready to move forward as a whole," she said. "Vocational training is no longer unconnected." A new TVET strategy for the Marshall Islands has been approved that will focus vocational training programs and NTC efforts in four areas:

- Developing a labor market information system that provides realistic information to influence government policies.

- Expanding vocational skills development programs in schools and in the informal sector.

- Establishing NTC's role as a monitoring and evaluation agency that sets and enforces standards for vocational training.

- Clarifying roles so that multiple agencies involved complement rather than compete with each other. NTC will focus in the non-formal sector, the Ministry of Education will handle elementary and high school, and CMI college level vocational training.

Maddison pointed out that

not only is CMI the nation's post-secondary institution by law, it has greatly expanded its capacity to deliver vocational training programs, which started several years ago with the Toolbox training. Now, CMI is offering a one-year carpentry course, is taking on the Jitok Kabeel vocational program, and is gearing to roll out a marine training program. "The issue for vocational training is how many electricians and plumbers do we need in the RMI?" Maddison asked. This is why the trainings must be "demand-driven" to meet specific needs identified by the private sector, she said. In addition, the "layered" approach to training is part of the new road map for meeting vocational training needs here. "For example," she said, "if a student drops out of high school, they still have options to develop skills."

She is happy to see that what started out as basic sewing, handicraft and carpentry trainings for young women and men offered by local NGOs has now developed into the offering of "advanced" courses. "NTC has helped with training of

Marie steps down at NTC

Marie Maddison has planned to step down from NTC since early last year, having advised the RMI agency's board of her plan.

NTC has been advertising for a new Director and Maddison said she is hopeful a person will be selected by the board this month for a timely transition.

She is one of the most experienced administrators in the RMI government. She got her start as a Public Service Commissioner with the launching of Constitutional government in 1979.

Since that time, she has been secretary of the Ministries of Social Services, Education, Health and Foreign Affairs. She also had a stint at the College of the Marshall Islands, and has been active in the operation of WUTMI, the national women's organization, over the years.

trainers for advanced courses (in these skill areas)," she said. "Building capacity has been a major effort."

News of the success of these NGO-driven, NTC-funded skills trainings for out-of-school youth have spread, including the canoe and carpentry training program run by WAM. "Now, outer island senators are talking with them about canoe and woodworking trainings," Maddison said.

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