Member Spotlight:
No Regrets:
The Inspirational Life of Jesa Lopez

Jesa Lopez was born to dance. By the time she turned 16 she was both an accomplished ballerina and actress, and her future was fully planned: she was going to be a star. It was more than a dream, it was her passion, and she was well on her way. Her 16th summer was busy with rehearsals with her high school dance team, performing Shakespeare in the park and preparing for a July audition with a national touring dance company. Earlier that year she traveled to a national dance and acting competition and placed in the top 10 in the country for dance. Lopez was on the brink of realizing everything. Then, on June 21, 1996, less than a mile from home, one distracted moment turned her dreams into a waking nightmare.

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Trainings Offered
for Top 10 Quality Assurance and SPA/Clinical Review Issues

In an effort to provide more information for ADvantage providers, training will be offered to address the “Top 10” critical issues identified in both our Quality Assurance and Service Plan Authorization/ Clinical Review Units.

Area 1: Autry Technology Center, Enid, March 27
Area 2: Great Plains Technology Center, Lawton, May 29

(A provider bulletin will be distributed prior to each training to announce opening of registration.)

Area 3: Moore Norman Technology Center (South Penn Campus), Oklahoma City, July 24
Area 4: (Location to be announced), McAlester, April 30
Area 5: Indian Capital Technology Center, Muskogee, Feb. 27
Area 6: Tulsa Technology Center (BA Campus) Broken Arrow, June 26

Register online for each of these events at: http://events.oucpm.org/advantage/
Lopez does not remember the accident. She only knows what others have told her. Apparently, she dropped her pager, and while reaching to see who was trying to contact her, the vehicle she was driving drifted across the center line and hit a minivan head-on. Her ankle, hips, pelvis, ribs and arm were broken. Her lungs and bladder were punctured and her stomach was torn. The front of her skull was fractured, her brain was swollen and exposed, and her neck was broken at the C6-7 vertebrae. The doctors told her mother Lopez would not survive the night and, if by some miracle she did, her brain damage was so severe she would never wake up, breathe, eat on her own, or walk again.

What the doctors failed to realize was that “quit” was not something Lopez ever did and “can’t” was never part of her vocabulary. Telling her “no” was the surest way to make her work even harder. She woke a few days later, was off the ventilator and eating solid food in a short time. It was obvious her brain was working just fine but she was paralyzed from the chest down. She was in the hospital, then a rehabilitation facility and skilled nursing facility until September when she was released to go home. Her mother, with the help of state nurses and therapists, became her primary caregiver. As soon as Lopez was old enough to be eligible, she became an ADvantage program Member.

Her return home was not the end of recovery for Lopez. She was determined to walk again. At first she thought, “I’ve missed the first football game, but I’ll be back dancing by homecoming.” Then, “I missed football season, but I’ll be dancing for the basketball games.” Then she realized the doctor may have been right about one thing: all of her physical therapy was not going to make her walk again.

So she looked at other treatment options. A year after the accident, she traveled to Argentina for surgery that was supposed to enable her to walk. But during surgery, the spinal cord injury was discovered to be much more severe than previously thought and full repair was impossible. She came home discouraged, thinking the surgery was a failure. But soon she realized she gained more use of her arms, and areas of feeling and control were returning to much of her upper body.

After the surgery, she realized she needed a back-up plan in case she never walked again, so she enrolled in college. She had no idea what major to choose. All she had ever wanted to do was to perform.

Lopez decided to major in victims services since it did not require math and she enjoyed psychology. Her first class was “victimology” and she took on a volunteer project for extra credit. Her requirements for an organization for which she would volunteer were simple: close to home, wheelchair accessible and no domestic violence shelters. Ironically, she was paired with a domestic violence shelter hours from home, but from the first day she knew she belonged there.

The first attempt at college did not go well and although she left school, she stayed at the domestic violence shelter for 10 years and became a house manager. She returned to school and is only nine units away from her degree. But continuing her formal education has been an “on-again, off-again” journey due to her health issues.

“Spinal cord injuries lead to so many other problems,” says Lopez. “Your organs have to work so much harder and you become more susceptible to illnesses of all kinds. The injuries to my bladder and lungs have caused a lot of issues. My lungs fill up with fluid really quickly. I was just ill the whole month of November. I can’t take antibiotics anymore because I have
had too many in my life. Now they cause an illness that is more serious than the infections I would be taking them for.”

Not yet finishing her college degree has not slowed Lopez down, however. She completed a professional certification program through the Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence. And in addition to her work in that area, she also worked at a suicide prevention hotline, the 2-1-1 service line, and sold insurance.

It took nearly 16 years for Lopez to accept that, barring a miraculous advance in medical procedures, she will never walk again. But she also discovered that her life and her dreams did not end, they simply took a different path. She can do nearly everything she did before the accident and more, she just does things differently. She drives with adaptive hand controls, hunts with Oklahoma Outdoor Outreach, and bowls on a league with the Mid-America division of the Paralyzed Veterans. And she discovered a new passion – advocacy.

Lopez’s life of service that started when her grandparents took her and her younger brother to perform in nursing homes, and which continued with her involvement in her high school Key Club, has not slowed down. Lopez is a tireless advocate for people with disabilities, especially those with spinal cord injuries. She is working for improved and continued transitional support for people with paralysis after release from the hospital or rehabilitation facility.

“There is more to adjusting to life in a wheelchair than learning how to operate the chair,” says Lopez. “People need continued physical, emotional and psychological help adjusting to the radical changes life in a wheelchair brings.”

AAU Team Spotlight:
Amanda McCaslin, SPA Unit Programs Supervisor

We are pleased to introduce Amanda McCaslin, programs supervisor for the Service Plan Authorization Unit. The SPA Unit consists of 12 employees responsible for reviewing all service plans submitted by provider agency case managers. The team focuses on the ADvantage paid services and ensures all core elements of a comprehensive plan are documented. The team also identifies health and safety issues, verifies legal requirements of the plan, and authorizes services when all elements of the ADvantage Waiver are accurately documented.

In February, McCaslin celebrated 13 years of facilitating improved quality of life for numerous individuals as a result of the ADvantage Waiver. She moved from the Long Term Care Authority to the AAU where she worked in the file room pulling charts, opening mail and filing paperwork. McCaslin is one of the original members of the SPA Unit. She considers herself fortunate because she has a career she loves and has the opportunity on a daily basis to help individuals improve their quality of life.

McCaslin was born and raised in Tulsa. She has one brother and is currently a student at Tulsa Community College majoring in nursing. McCaslin has been married for five years and has an adorable 2-year-old daughter. She met her husband on her birthday 10 years ago and says he was the best birthday present ever. McCaslin enjoys reading, baking and, most of all, delights in the time she gets to spend with her family.
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And what happened to Lopez’s passion for dance? Several years ago her younger brother came home from a friend’s house and was excited about a new Wii game system and a game he had played called “Just Dance.”

“Jesa,” he said, “I think you can do this!”

Lopez got the game and was soon beating everyone who challenged her. More importantly, she beat some of her doubts when she realized that even though her legs could not move, the rest of her body could still dance. Her arms, her center core...everything else was still there, including her talent. With the help of her occupational therapist, she found Shannon, who teaches dancers with disabilities.

“It’s amazing to see kids who can barely move, but when the teacher puts on their shoes and starts the music they come alive!” she said.

She has been dancing ever since. Lopez choreographed and starred in a “Thank You” dance at the Abilities Expo in Oklahoma City and planned a Valentine’s Day Dance for people with disabilities in February.

In October 2012, Lopez received the Oklahoma City Mayor’s Committee on Disability Concerns Don Davis Award. She is also the reigning Ms. Wheelchair Oklahoma and received the Nicki Ard Award at the pageant for her positive attitude and willingness to serve others.

Lopez gives the ADvantage program a lot of credit for where she is today. “Having a personal care attendant has allowed me to get out of the house to work, go to school and participate in all the activities I do. Without home care I would have to be in a nursing home. And if that had happened, I would probably be dead long before now.”

When asked if she would like to say anything to our providers Lopez said, “Just remember we are not case numbers or illnesses, we are people first.”

What is in store for Lopez’s future? She has many duties to fulfill as Ms. Wheelchair Oklahoma, including preparations for choosing her successor. Of course, Lopez will continue to advocate and she will dance. Lopez’s life has come full circle: she has been approached to join a professional dance troupe in Ohio. The prospect of moving out of state for the first time in her life and starting over somewhere new is frightening. But when asked if she would accept the offer if it is still available after her term as Ms. Wheelchair Oklahoma ends, Lopez said she would like to.

“I asked ‘what if’ so many times after the wreck. I want to try every opportunity that comes my way,” she says. “I don’t ever want to look back again and say ‘what if?’ knowing I could have changed it.”

CD-PASS Service Update

In May 2012, AAU notified ADvantage provider agencies of the expansion of the CD-PASS service option to Pittsburgh County residents. The AAU held two days of CDA training sessions for case management agencies serving Pittsburgh County in June 2012 to meet the need for new Member enrollment. Additional CDA refresher training was provided for all case management agencies in October 2012.

The AAU will expand the CD-PASS service option into the areas of Osage County not previously covered. Expansion into Oklahoma County at a future date is also planned.
Inside the AAU: ADvantage Assisted Living

The ADvantage Program began pursuing the concept of assisted living services in 2005 and added it as a service option in 2008. Heritage Assisted Living was the first ADvantage assisted living facility contracted to provide services under the ADvantage Waiver in 2009. Currently there are six certified ADvantage assisted living facilities in Oklahoma: Heritage Assisted Living, Canadian County; Chisholm Trail Assisted Living, Stephens County; Village at Oakwood, LLC, Oklahoma County; Golden Oaks Village of Stillwater, LLC, Payne County; Ash Street Place, LLC, Logan County; and Grandwood Assisted Living, Delaware County. Cumulatively, these facilities serve an average of 160 ADvantage Members.

Brenda Lambeth has served as the program manager for this service option since April 2011. Cathy Murrell joined the AAU as social services specialist for the ADvantage Assisted Living service option in April 2012. On July 1, 2012, the AAU assumed responsibility for determining financial and categorical eligibility for ADvantage Assisted Living Members, which was previously exclusively performed at the OKDHS Human Services Centers.

This service option has been cascaded slowly to ensure the success of both the service option as well as each individual Assisted Living Member. Great care has been taken to remove each obstacle encountered in the early stages of development. In addition to meeting the traditional eligibilities for the ADvantage Program, Assisted Living Members must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The individual’s current residence is unsafe
- The current residence has barriers limiting the individual’s function
- The individual is at imminent risk for losing their current housing
- Supports are not available for the individual’s required level of need for assistance
- The individual is a private-pay assisted living resident and has exhausted resources to the extent of needing ADvantage service to remain in an assisted living setting

The ADvantage assisted living case manager certification training launched in June 2012 and 125 case managers earned their assisted living service option certification. Two more trainings were presented and 86 additional case managers became certified.

Effective January 1, 2013, all ADvantage case managers must obtain ADvantage assisted living case manager certification before having ADvantage Assisted Living Members in their case load. The next ADvantage assisted living case manager certification training is planned for March 2013. Details will be provided in an upcoming provider bulletin.

The AAU continues to accept inquiries and applications from interested assisted living facilities. These inquiries should be directed to ADvantage Contracts Unit at 918-933-4900.

"THE ROAD TO AGING WELL: ENJOY YOUR TRIP" - MAY 21-23

38TH ANNUAL OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE ON AGING
Capitalizing on What Comes

The Oklahoma State Legislature’s decision to increase rates in the last session brought a sigh of relief and the good news created an air of expectancy in an otherwise worrisome economic climate. It is reasonable to assume that since the Legislature approved a rate increase, it was a simple matter to increase the rate. But as Albert Einstein said, “Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler.” Things should not be more complicated than needed, but it is important to get the process right, both for our Members and for those who provide their support.

There was no doubt the rate conversion would require many hours devoted to planning and testing. It was clear that increasing 14 rates for services and converting 67,532 service lines would be a monumental and unprecedented undertaking. Ultimately, it was decided to employ a new process for rate conversion to help mill the elephant-sized process into malleable portions. At first, the task seemed insurmountable, but the mission proved possible and the services designated for an increase have been converted.

Follow-up activities will continue well into the next few months, which may include adjustments to individual service plans, but the most daunting aspect of the task has been accomplished.

Thank you to everyone who was, and is, in any way involved with the rate conversion, particularly agency providers.

Process Improvements to Service Plan Authorization

The Service Plan Authorization Unit of the AAU is directed to turn around service plans within three working days. However, in September 2012 the SPA turnaround time was closer to seven or eight days. The AAU and SPA management proposed a new idea to improve the turnaround time.

The new idea involved breaking the single team into three smaller teams – two teams of four people and one team of three people. The smaller teams allowed for a “group” approach as opposed to an “individualized” approach. The new, smaller teams accepted the idea and met the challenge of improving the turnaround time. Team members collaborated individually and teams helped each other process the workload. In turn, there were groups of four people working on 20 plans, as opposed to one person working on five plans.

In less than five days, SPA’s turnaround time decreased from seven days to two days. It was an amazing effort. Since this process improvement was implemented, SPA has maintained a two- to three-day turnaround time, which is not only ideal but is also the projected process timeline. This one small, simple change led to complete success of an entire department!

HAVE A GREAT SPRING!