

## Amerigroup Case Managers: Learning, Listening and Teaching

Six-year-old Angel Contreras had barely started first grade when he fell behind other students in his class. The problem wasn't that he couldn't or wouldn't learn. The problem was Angel's asthma.

Last fall, when Angel enrolled in elementary school in Mesquite, Texas, his chronic asthma turned life upside down for his whole family. Angel hacked and coughed through sleepless nights, regularly visited hospital emergency rooms (ERs) and missed day after day of class. His mother, Raquel, lost sleep, missed work and struggled to care for Angel and his 5-year-old twin sisters.

Then Karen Maier called. A registered nurse and case manager for Amerigroup, Karen has been fighting asthma for more than 20 years. She's worked as a pediatric hospital nurse and raised two children who suffered from serious asthma. Karen's goal was simple: She wanted to help the Contreras family learn things she had spent two decades learning herself.

Through a series of monthly conversations, Karen offered Raquel practical advice about controlling asthma. Karen

suggested that hypoallergenic bedding might help Angel breathe better at night; Raquel bought the items the next day. Karen provided a simple tube-like device that helped Angel's asthma inhaler work more effectively. She helped Raquel carefully monitor Angel's symptoms and use of asthma medications, so Raquel could give detailed information to Angel's doctor.

"It's a lot like being a detective," Karen said of her work with Amerigroup members who have asthma. "You have to ask a lot of questions to figure out exactly what their condition is. And when you find out, you have to teach them how to talk to their doctor about it."

Asthma is a condition Amerigroup monitors closely in its members. In fact, asthma is one of eight disease management programs for which Amerigroup has earned accreditation from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). Other Amerigroup NCQA-accredited disease management programs include chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, diabetes, major depressive disorder, schizophrenia and HIV/AIDS. Such conditions, including asthma, can be common



**Amerigroup Case Manager Karen Maier**

among the vulnerable populations served by Amerigroup, and the opportunity to make a difference in these members' lives through dedicated outreach programs is tremendous.

Karen's work gets significant results. She's trained other Amerigroup case managers in her techniques for counseling asthmatics. And she's a founding member of the Asthma Coalition of Texas, a group of health care professionals that advises the state of Texas on its efforts to combat this disease.

**“Nobody ever took the time to talk to me about asthma until Karen.”**

**Raquel Contreras**  
Amerigroup member

But Karen sees her most important results in children like Angel. In the year before Karen began working with his family, Angel visited hospital ERs 11 times for asthma treatment; in the six months since Karen's first call, he has visited the ER once. He is sleeping through the night and rarely misses school. Raquel says that Angel is now one of the strongest readers in his class.

“Nobody ever took the time to talk to me about asthma until Karen,” Raquel said. “It's made a huge difference for our family and for Angel.”