

Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

The right person for your case

By **DEBBIE COUNCIL**
Staff Writer

Saturday, January 22, 2005 - A former executive making a six-figure income, Barbara Wilson felt like she was in the deepest, darkest hole. In 2002, her husband was dying of cancer and she was struggling with lupus that was slowly killing her. In December 2000, lupus had damaged her heart and her physician said she could no longer work. A year later she had exhausted her state disability.

It became a vicious cycle. The couple had custody of her husband's two daughters, 10 and 17, one of whom had a mental condition. Wilson needed Medi-Cal and Social Security disability benefits but her file was lost in the system. She needed Medi-Cal to receive crucial medications. She needed food stamps. They were starving.

Before her husband's death Jan. 14, 2004, his salary had been garnished because records showed that he hadn't paid child support. Yet, they had custody of the girls whose mother was mentally ill. After his death, the mother regained custody of the girls. Now Wilson was no longer eligible for Medi-Cal benefits since she no longer had dependent children. Without income, she was in jeopardy of losing her house. It was denial after denial for benefits.

"It's like you're trying to tread water in the ocean. And you've got these two babies who are losing their dad and their mom is mentally ill and she can't take care of them," said Wilson, 52, of Glendora. "And I'm dying and I'm trying everything I can to hold these babies up so they don't drown. I tell God I can't do it."

The next day her prayer was answered. Barbara Case, 55, of San Dimas, threw Wilson a life preserver. As president of Compassion in Action - USA, a non-profit corporation that she founded in June 2002, Case advocates for the ill or injured who need assistance receiving Social Security disability, SSI disability and/or Medi-Cal/Medicaid.

Case, who had received a call from Glendora Welfare, contacted Los Angeles County supervisor Mike Antonovich's office and told them about Wilson's situation. That same day she was approved for Medi-Cal and food stamps. Just last week, Case finally succeeded in winning the case for Wilson to receive Social Security disability back pay.

"She was too involved with taking care of Ted to be able to even focus on her Social Security," Case said from her home in San Dimas Jan. 14. "The secret is knowing who to call."

Being told no or can't is the button that gets pushed for Case to spring into action. Roadblocks are a challenge. She doesn't waste time. She aims for the top because starting at the bottom takes too long and it's useless. She said her only goal is to help the silent disabled.

The oldest of 12 growing up in the Midwest, Case became adept at asking the right questions, negotiating and problem solving.

"If there was a word beyond persistent, that would be Barb," said Wilson who was at Case's house that morning. "She's an intelligent woman and people have a lot of need for her. She's nonoffensive and nonthreatening. I would say it's a divine style."

A series of events through the years with family and friends and a second marriage to Phil honed Case's skills when she sought answers and solutions involving mental illness, juvenile diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome and adoption issues. She developed relationships with schools, city, state and federal officials. She learned the Social Security system. She documents everything.

In two years, Case has won all 16 cases she's represented. All cases are free of charge. That was during her spare time after working full-time. She's working on 40 other cases. Her phone rings day and night from around the country. She's won cases in Georgia, North Carolina, Iowa and Northern California. The Compassion In Action web site at www.compassioninaction.us posts testimonials from people she has helped and has other helpful information.

"Even if I don't know how to do it I figure it out. I don't know the how or the why," she said. "The attitude I have is I have this person's life in my hands because literally by the time you get to these hearings that person is going to die if you don't win."

It was her close friend Cathy Maxwell's situation that inspired Case to start Compassion In Action. For 14 years Maxwell had battled breast cancer. Her husband left her with no health insurance. Her age and no dependent children was the reason Medi-Cal and Social Security gave for denying her benefits.

Case contacted Maxwell's county supervisor and congressman's offices. In November 1995 she received her first Social Security check. Maxwell died Jan. 10, 1996.

"As a result of this, what happened is that instead of her family having to fight how in the world they were going to care for her, how they were going to get her medical care, how they were going to pay for any of this, they spent those last months loving each other and caring for each other," she said. "It was a beautiful death."

As much as Case enjoys helping others, she said it's becoming increasingly difficult for her without the help of volunteers or donations because she still works full time. She needs someone to help her with fund-raising. Last year Compassion In Action received about \$10,000, half of that from Wells Fargo.

She said it's not fair to take money from the clients she has helped because they've had to go without money for so long. And they're generally too ill to do volunteer work.

"We need \$100,000 a year so I don't have to work, so that I can train advocates across the country and do this throughout the country," Case said. "I know how to win these cases."

Ted Powl, president and chief executive officer of the San Dimas Chamber of Commerce, said Case is a unique person who saw a need to help others and has committed her life to making that dream come true.

"I can just imagine how many people she will be able to help when she gets the funding support behind her," Powl said. "In today's world, getting support from the complex social service system we have created requires a special talent. Many of the most needy of the system's support are the least equipped to navigate their way to solutions."

To contact Case and Compassion In Action-USA call (909) 599-2087 or info@compassioninaction.us. Send contributions to 1205 W. Cypress, No. 193, San Dimas 91773.