

# Organization pushes for disability benefits

By Maritza Velazquez, Staff Writer



Adam Perez, 27, of East Los Angeles, "Godson", sits in his grandmother's kitchen in West Covina, Friday, Nov. 23. Adam Perez has been battling leukemia for six years, and he recently lost most of his eye sight from radiation treatments. (James Carbone/Correspondent)

Life for Adam Perez hasn't been easy.

At just 27 years old, he has battled leukemia, gotten a bone marrow transplant, dealt with neuropathy and is now facing the hardships associated with cataracts and blindness.

His condition prevented him from working, but at one time, when he needed financial assistance and medical insurance the most, he was rejected for disability benefits. That was until Barbara Case and her nonprofit organization Compassion in Action, based in San Dimas, came into the picture.

In 2006, the Social Security Office conducted a check on Perez, who had already been receiving disability benefits for four years. After the review, Perez was denied further benefits.

He turned to Compassion in Action for help.

"I really didn't care about my money situation, I was more worried about my medical insurance," Perez said in an interview on Nov. 7 at his parents' house in West Covina. "Imagine if that would've happened to someone more helpless than me."

Compassion in Action, an advocate organization for disability cases, won Perez's appeal. Case has won every appeal for every client she has been involved with since she founded the organization in 2002.

"It's critically important (to help these people), because a huge percentage of the homeless are homeless because they were sick, either mentally or physically, and weren't able to get the benefits," Case said.

She said part of the problem associated with people being rejected for disability is the lack of time Social Security's consultative examiners take with these applicants.

"What these doctors appear to be doing is they take five minutes with these patients," she said. "And I know the ones here are getting \$121 an hour. I think they do it just for the money."

It was one doctor's report that leads Adam Perez to think it was the deciding factor in him being denied his benefits last year.

A Dr. Jason Yang, who saw Perez for about five minutes as well, asked him his name, birthday and other basic information.

"They said I was on LSD for 20 years, but I was sober for seven," Perez said. He was only 24 at the time.

The report also cites Perez living in Monrovia, which is false since he lives in East Los Angeles, and also says that the patient drove himself to the appointment. His girlfriend at the time drove him to the appointment, according to Perez.

So Barbara Case and her volunteer staff went to work. Although she has no legal background, she has done enough research that has won her every single case she has been an advocate for.

She fills in holes in her clients' files and makes sure their doctors answer all the questions needed to be addressed. She even drives her clients to their medical or court appointments when they are too weak or sick to do it themselves.

"With social security, you can't get it unless you can't do any kind of work," she said. "You have to prove why you can't do anything at all and that's a lot to do for someone who's really sick. A lot of times they just give up."

One of her clients died after he was denied social security benefits.

Frederick White of West Covina had cardiac problems, obstructive sleep apnea, stiffness and spasms in the mid- and lower back, coronary artery disease, deformity of his left ankle and had undergone seven eye surgeries and knee surgery.

In March 2006, he applied with Social Security for disability benefits. He was sent to a consultative examiner to help the agency make a decision on his case.

But according to Case, White never actually saw the examiner, Dr. John Sedge, who wrote the report. He only saw a technician who X-rayed his knee.

Despite the allegations that he had never actually examined White, Sedge said in the report that White could "stand and walk six hours in an eight-hour day with normal breaks."

Sedge further wrote, "The findings of the physical examination are based on formal testing and my observations of the patient's spontaneous actions."

Sedge was not available for comment but Dr. Jack Sedge, who is also with Millennium Multispecialty Medical Group, denied the allegations.

When asked if their practice ever writes reports without actually seeing their patients, he replied, "No. We have to actually see the patient in order to write the report."

White was denied disability benefits in June 2006.

The disapproval letter cited that White's condition was not severe enough to prevent him from working at his job as a security guard.

When Case began working on his appeal, she had two of his regular physicians write reports. Their findings contradict the reports Dr. John Sedge had written shortly before White received the rejection letter.

A letter written by Dr. Richard L. Kennedy said that White was unable to sit for periods longer than 20 minutes and unable to walk for more than 30 yards at a time.