



THREE local nonprofits have joined forces to better fulfill its mission. From left, Maxine Coleman, founder of Heart and Soul Services that gives supplies to needy children; Barbara Case, founder of Compassion in Action-U.S.A. which helps the disabled or ill; and Helen Marshall, director of services for the Glendora Welfare Association.

SWASHBUCKLING LADIES TEAM UP TO HELP THOSE IN DISTRESS

*By ANISSA V. RIVERA
Staff Writer*

They are three women on a mission, bound by a history of service and a need to help future generations. But they still enjoy a good laugh. When the founders of two nonprofits and the director of another decided to announce their newfound partnership, they donned Three Musketeers costumes and brandished toy swords to make their point. "Oh, that Helen is a firecracker," said Barbara Case of San Dimas, founder of Compassion in Action USA, a free service to the ill or disabled that

helps them make sense of Medicare and other bureaucratic mazes.

"She's just full of ideas."

"That Helen" is Helen Marshall, director of services for Glendora Welfare Association. Her group helps Glendora residents in emergencies -- providing food, shelter, utilities, clothing, transportation or rent. The third Musketeer is Maxine Coleman, of La Puente, founder of Heart and Soul Services in Glendora, which helps poor children in the East San Gabriel Valley with school supplies and other needs. It was Marshall who contacted the other two women in the summer to talk about joining forces. For Case, a longtime resident of San Dimas, the three-pronged partnership will make for three stronger and more successful nonprofits.

And success for these three women isn't measured by dollars and cents. There's the Glendora woman with lupus who couldn't get Medicare or disability benefits and who stood to lose her home. But now she receives monthly checks and has an affordable insurance plan.

Then there are the needy children in La Puente schools that get new undergarments and tennis shoes, thanks to Coleman's group. Before they met last summer, the women worked mostly on their own. Coleman had been taking in children into her La Puente home for years before she started her nonprofit a couple of years ago. "Mostly, they were friends of my (three) daughters - our house was always open to children," she said. "I mothered everybody." Heart and Soul Services, based in Glendora, today helps children in East San Gabriel Valley schools, and even some in Los Angeles. The group buys tennis shoes, underclothes and distributes toys to 600 children during the holidays. Coleman is also starting a nutrition program. Heart and Soul also offers adults a community life-skills and mentoring program. "My heart is in this," she said. "I love the children, and with all the government cuts, the kids need help. We're doing our work with the funds we have but we can do so much more."

For Case, a longtime San Dimas resident, her mission began with family members who need ed help filling out and following up on citizenship papers and social security applications. "For me, (the work) is logical," Case said. "If you can't get something done and it's a county situation or a federal situation, who do you go to?"

One friend was dying from breast cancer and had no health insurance. "Cathy was told by Medi-Cal and Social Security that she wasn't eligible for benefits because she wasn't in retirement age and she didn't have dependent children," Case said.

Case rallied local politicians who helped her friend get Social Security benefits, Medi-Cal and hospice care until she died two months later. "Her final months she was able to spend without the stress of worrying about money or insurance," Case said. "The system is so bogged down by bureaucracy, a lot of families go through a lot of trauma just being disabled or ill, and the system doesn't help you -- it's awful."

After her friend's death in 1996, Case started Compassion in Action- USA. At that time, Case worked full-time as an office manager, so she called politicians and wrote letters for clients during her lunch breaks or after work. Today, she works 60 hours a week to devote more time to helping people. "I help people explain their situation in a clear, definitive way and we counter everything with strong documentation," she said. "If it's legitimate, we can win your case."

For free.

Case said through her Web site, www.compassioninaction.us, people from as far away as North Carolina or Illinois ask for help. "These are suffering human beings, it's inhumane to take somebody and throw them into the streets because they didn't have the right letter," she said. Eventually, Case hopes to gather enough data and statistics about the inadequacies of social services to effect a change in government.

"Meanwhile, we educate our clients and other people on how to advocate for themselves and others," she said.

For Case, Coleman and Marshall, the work they've agreed to help each other continues. "You know you have the tools even if it's frustrating at times," Case said. "To be able to see the relief on a person's face, that's something."

"It never stops. You're always trying to figure out who else can I help?" Coleman said.

For more information about Compassion in Action, call (909) 599-2087; for Heart and Soul Services, call (626) 335-1740 and for Glendora Welfare Association, call (626) 857-1181.

Compassion in Action's Web site is www.compassioninaction.us. Heart and Soul Services is at 620 W. Route 66, Suite 107, Glendora. Donations are always welcome. Volunteer opportunities are also available.

Anissa V. Rivera can be reached at (626) 962-8811, Ext. 2801 or by e-mail at anissa.rivera@sgvn.com.

*Anissa V. Rivera
Reporter
Azusa Herald
Glendora Press
San Dimas/La Verne Highlander
1210 N. Azusa Canyon Road
West Covina CA 91790
(626) 962-8811, Ext. 2801*