

## **MFY Mourns the Death of Deborah Danner**

MFY Legal Services mourns the death of Deborah Danner, a 66-year-old African-American woman who was shot by police who were called to her Bronx apartment after neighbors reported she was acting erratically.

Each year MFY provides legal assistance to thousands of New Yorkers who have mental illness and who live in the community. Like Ms. Danner, most are able to live active, productive lives with the help of treatment and support from mental health professionals, family, and community. But on occasion, treatment fails or something occurs to cause a person with mental illness to decompensate.

In many cases when police are called they are able to help calm an agitated person, and many police departments now have special teams that are trained to appropriately handle these situations. Ms. Danner, in an article she wrote in 2012, was well aware of the dangers faced by people with mental illness when they interact with police: “We are all aware of the all too frequent news stories about the mentally ill who come up against law enforcement instead of mental health professionals and end up dead.”

In her article, Ms. Danner speaks positively of the support she was receiving from a therapist and the ongoing acceptance and support she received from her church. The situation would undoubtedly have ended differently if someone from her support network had been called in to help. And at a time when public attention is focused on police killings of African-Americans, one may wonder whether police would have been as quick to take aim against a white woman. All police officers need specialized training in order to respond appropriately to situations like Ms. Danner’s, and the protocols on calling in mental health professionals need to be vigorously observed and strengthened if tragedies like this are to be prevented in the future.