

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Feedback Friday is Greater New York's weekly spot for readers to share their views



For the Mentally Ill, Few Places to Turn

Police Commissioner James O'Neill said the New York Police Department failed in the fatal shooting of 66-year-old Deborah Danner ("Police Shooting Scrutinized," Oct. 20). Our mental-health system also failed Ms. Danner and others like her. Her death must be a call to action to repair the flawed and fractured mental-health system.

The Fountain House community serves people with serious mental illness, empowering them to make meaningful contributions. Our members obtain transitional employment, return to school and even pursue their artistic interests.

Fountain House is an entirely voluntary program. If someone decides to leave, we cannot compel them to return. In the past, we operated a robust outreach program that allowed us to call and visit individuals in their homes in an effort to bring them back to our community. Several years ago, however, the city cut almost half a million dollars from our budget to operate this program.

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) is an example of an existing program that can intervene in the lives of people with serious mental illness in a more aggressive way. ACT teams provide treatment,

rehabilitation and support services in the homes and communities of individuals whose needs haven't been met in more traditional mental-health settings.

Deborah would have and should have qualified for ACT. We know that when people are visited by ACT teams or when they are connected to community-based mental-health programs, they survive and thrive. They more often than not realize the dreams, goals and aspirations that all people, including those with serious mental illness, hold for themselves.

Kenneth J. Dudek MSW

President, Fountain House

New York