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By ED FROST

"The people we serve don't know when we'll be open. We don't know when we'll be open. It's unfair to the people out here. They've gotten used to a certain level of services. Without us, it's back to anything goes in court, and we won't make a dent because there's not enough of us."

The attorneys at MFY Legal Services are angry. After three years of attrition, watching the staff shrink from 74 people to 59, MFY is facing cutbacks which may even force layoffs. In addition, MFY lost a VISTA contract this year which has shrunk their volunteer staff from thirteen to two in two years. The managing attorney of MFY's Tenth Avenue office, Larry Grosberg, says "There is no question that we will serve less people than we used to."

A couple things make this particularly depressing for employees at MFY. One, their program, which pioneered legal services in the early sixties, was the model from which the National Legal Services Corporation (LSC) was drawn when Congress established it in 1974. Two, thanks to Federal appropriations which have tripled the LSC budget, most other legal services agencies in the city are growing as fast as they can.

"It is the supreme irony in the face of such expansion," reads an MFY background memo, "that the program which started legal services in New York and was the prototype nationally is shrinking and is now facing the real possibility of being dismantled."

MFY is an outgrowth of a lower East Side social service agency, Mobilization For Youth, begun in 1962. Since then it has operated several neighborhood offices in Manhattan, in a program using both lawyers and social workers.

Because it was one of the first such agencies in the country, and because its staff includes professionals other than lawyers, it has been funded at a level significantly higher than other legal services corporations. For the last two years, while others are catching up, MFY has been standing still. Since costs have outstripped small cost-of-living increases, MFY has been running with a growing budget deficit. As of September 30, that deficit reached \$40,000. By next September, said Grosberg, it could reach \$75,000 to \$100,000.

At their December 5th meeting, the board of directors of Community Action for Legal Services (CALs), an umbrella agency overseeing MFY and nine other delegate agencies in New York, took the position that they will no longer continue to manage deficits. This means that MFY must either get more money to cover its costs, or spend less by cutting its program.

"Cutbacks will impact tremendously," said Bob Hartman, a staff attorney at the East 2nd Street office. "MFY is the only decentralized legal services corporation in the city. People know about it and come in. We think that's the way to operate, but CALS wants us to dump two offices and centralize.

"If legal services is worth anything at all,"

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he continued, "it's worth it on a storefront basis. A lot of people don't believe that, but I disagree. You get a feel for the neighborhood, for the problems on the street. You listen to the same complaints, you see the same faces in court, and you know something is going on. You can't pick that up at Broadway and Worth."

"It might be a new wave, that everyone in legal services will be in big shiny office buildings and you won't get a feel for what's going on out there. I think the direction things are going in is bad, but under CALS' rules they're right and eventually they'll cut us out. In my opinion, the people who are making these decisions don't know anything about legal services."

Cathy Mitchell, General Counsel to CALS, has the responsibility for managing the budget day-to-day. She explained some of the problems.

In 1977 Congress set up a funding formula for the Legal Services Corporation, the result of which was the setting of minimum levels

below what MFY and other Manhattan programs had already received. So when CALS applied for "access funds" for new programs for the other boroughs to bring them up to minimum levels, the Manhattan programs, funded higher, were not eligible and received nothing.

"MFY is the only program with a deficit at the moment," said Mitchell. "We have taken the position that the MFY board of directors must examine the program, how it looks and runs." For instance, "other programs don't use social workers, but case handlers who can perhaps take more cases and accomplish the same objectives. I can't say that their higher costs here cover more services.

"It's easy for the program to consider consolidating offices, although that has its problems," she added. "Certainly the community should have input. If no action is taken, then the program will have to be restructured by the CALS board."

Asked about MFY's future, she said, "I see a program that is still relatively helping, but having a lot of difficult questions to