Personal Development Center, Inc
(the early years)

By Eileen Kelz

The Personal Development center, Inc. (PDC) was founded in 1972 by Eileen Kelz and Brenda Rowley. It had been a dream of Kelz's to have a center providing women with resources for personal development and support with issues affecting their daily lives.

PDC, then known as Personal Development Council, began as a home-based business. Rowley coordinated resources and information while Kelz presented Assertiveness Training classes for women, men, teens and area professionals.

PDC's earliest mission was to "provide preventive mental health services and programs that enriched the lives of women and their families." The organization's concept was uniquely ahead of it's time as the 1970's was the beginning of women's emergence as a force in society.

In the first two years over 150 women and their families were served by PDC. Funding was provided by the founders and fees from class participants.

When Rowley moved from the area in 1975, Bette Weber and Mary Pat Swamy of Marshfield joined Kelz as business partners. An office was opened in the Deming Building at 207 S. Central Avenue. To save costs the office space was shared with the Wisconsin Women's Credit Union.

With the addition of Swamy and Weber the organization became more formalized. In 1977 PDC was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation with Kelz, Swamy and Weber as principal officers.

Swamy and Weber brought new skills and interests to PDC. Bette Weber was trained as paraprofessional peer counselor and provided support to women experiencing life transitions. Swamy was in charge of marketing PDC services and assisting a building a broader funding base. Besides Assertiveness Training, Kelz became certified to teach a variety of interpersonal classes such as the Minnesota Couples Communication program.

PDC eventually received its first United Way funds totaling $300. Other support included a grant from Campaign for Human Development for the provision of services that empowered the lives of low income women.

In 1979, Kelz left the agency, and leadership was provided by Mary Pat Swamy. Growth continued as the Domestic Violence Program was funded by the State of Wisconsin. After a brief move to the St. Vincent DePaul building in 1981, the office was located in the Wood County Courthouse Annex at 604 E. Fourth Street.

In 1985, Mary James was hired as executive director. Under Mary's leadership and with a strong board of directors, PDC has made an impressive evolution. The organization has gained recognition for innovative programs and services. The agency has become involved with the promotion of family health through the implementation of the Family Resource Center of Marshfield. A new PDC program was funded by the Children's Trust Fund, the Ministry Fund Outreach Committee of St. Joseph's Hospital and the Marshfield Area United Way. The Domestic Violence Program continues to expand with a transitional program for families, self-esteem, education for adults and children and crisis advocacy. An emergency fund has been established for emergency services.

Funding for these additional programs has come from the Weyerhaeuser Foundation, The WICOR Foundation of Wisconsin Gas Company, the County of Wood, the State of Wisconsin, and Marshfield Area United Way. Donations from local churches, businesses and individuals supplement the grants made available for core programming.

PDC serves the community with a staff of six and additional student interns and volunteers. The office is now in City Hall Plaza at 630 south Central Avenue. The agency has taken an active role in the community by

collaborating with business and organizations to build our shared capacity to serve and strengthen service delivery systems within this area.

In 1997, the Personal Development Center, Inc. celebrated 20 years of service since incorporation.* The mission, values and goals of this unique organization continue to guide the board, staff, and volunteers. The agency honors this history, the vision of those serving PDC, and the community of Marshfield during this anniversary year.

*That article was written in ……for the community organizations book. It is now years later and PDC has now celebrated over 50 years of service to the Marshfield Community. There is now a full-time shelter named the Orenda Center where the offices are located and under the guidance of Executive Director, Rene Schultz serves a variety of services focusing on women and families in crises.