In October of 2003, the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence turned five years old. In the agency’s last five years, staff members have worked in every state in the U.S., except one: Massachusetts. The team has also worked internationally — in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Italy, Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The work has included conferences (on subjects ranging from law enforcement, to services for women, to expert witnesses), trainings, technical assistance site visits, its strategic planning, consulting, facilitation and logistical support for meetings, and networking and planning events.

“When Sarah [Buel] and I met to form Tucker, Buel, and Associates,” comments Executive Director Deborah Tucker, “we talked about how training and consulting were desperately needed and we had the idea that we might at some point establish a nonprofit agency. It was very important to both of us to look at domestic violence and sexual assault and especially at the intersection of these two problems. We knew that when we made the transition to a nonprofit, we wanted to focus on all forms of violence against women.” Comments Board Member and Univer.

In October of 1998, the agency opened its doors after receiving grants from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and the Texas Department of Human Services.

“In the very beginning,” Tucker remembers, “[then Associate Director] Pat Cole and I knew that this was going to be a huge risk — we didn’t know if what we wanted to do would be agreed upon by the universe. We found our first tiny office the summer before we opened. We looked deep into each other’s eyes and came up with $500 each for the security deposit. We knew that if we signed the lease and we failed, we’d owe the landlord $6000 and be unemployed. Luckily, the universe came through.” Buel notes, “We were blown away by how supportive activists around the country were when we were starting out.”

In December of 1998, the longstanding partnership with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center began, and in early 1999, a fruitful partnership began with the National Sheriffs’ Association. The Department of Defense work was a big surprise – I knew we’d be working as advocates trying to improve military responses and policies around domestic and sexual violence, but I never thought we’d have an opportunity to make a contribution to so many people. It was very fulfilling.” Tucker notes.

In 2001, the Center began training law enforcement officers on their response to sexual assault with the National Center for Rural Law Enforcement and Tucker began her three-year term as co-chair of the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence. “The Deployment of Defense work was a big surprise – I knew we’d be working as advocates trying to improve military responses and policies around domestic and sexual violence, but I never thought we’d have an opportunity to make a contribution to so many people. It was very fulfilling,” Tucker notes.

Associate Director, Pat Cole, passed away after a brief battle with cancer. Cole worked extensively in the poverty, welfare, and substance abuse arenas and was acutely aware of the multiple needs of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. She was committed to working in nontraditional settings and in non-traditional ways. Reeling from this loss, we hosted the Creating Individualized Services for Women: Responding to Multiple Needs of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Mental Health Disorders, and Substance Abuse conference, from September 10-12. This event was Cole’s brainchild, and her passion was a driving force in its development.

In September 11, as the conference was unfolding, the tragedies in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania unfolded. Like others around the country, our solace consisted of staying close to one another, holding ourselves and each other together. The law enforcement conference we held in December of that year was a success, but we were a dramatic decrease in participants compared with previous years. Understandably, people didn’t want to be away from home or traveling. This sentiment, combined with how the downturn in the economy and fewer dollars available for training, caused us to decide against holding further conferences and prodded us in other directions.

The National Center began to explore new possibilities. “As time and the Center itself grew,” comments founding Board member Gerson, “requests for different services came in and we began to look at all the different things we could do. Debby is a visionary; if she sees something that needs to be done, she wants to do it.” At the end of 2002, the agency was awarded the TAPS (Technical Assistance Providers Support) grant by OVW to support the work of organizations across the country.

A Herstory in Numbers

Upon celebrating our fifth birthday (October 1, 1998 through September 30, 2003), the National Center had accomplished the following...

Presented at 43 week-long Domestic Violence Train-the-Trainer or COPS Domestic Violence law enforcement training programs with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center

Presented at 37 two-day Domestic Violence: Intervention and investigation law enforcement training programs with the National Sheriffs’ Association

Presented at 5 sexual assault trainings for law-enforcement level officers (lieutenants, sheriffs, and chiefs of police) and investigators with the National Center for Rural Law Enforcement

Conducted 31 technical assistance and problem-solving site visits to local communities

Conducted 65 customized trainings on a wide variety of topics for diverse audiences for organizations nationwide

Presented 43 trainings (primarily Texas state and national conferences) on welfare, poverty, and low-income issues and how these intersect with domestic violence

Participated in 39 networking meetings with organizations across the country

Participated in 33 planning meetings or planning panels

Consulted with 26 communities and organizations across the country on strategic planning and organizational development

Sponsored 7 conferences of our own in Austin, Texas

Attended 20 professional development trainings

Provided logistical support for 32 meetings for the TAPS project

Participated in 26 meetings, hearings, site visits, and trainings for the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence. Executive Director Debby Tucker served for the life of the Task Force [three years] as the peer-appointed civilian Co-Chair. She and the National Center continue to support and work for the realization of the hundreds of recommendations made by Task Force experts.

In addition to providing services, the National Center also maintains two significant information resources. The first...
is its library -- under the guidance of staff librarian Nancy Flanakin, the agency has built this resource to include over 4,300 catalogued items (and growing!). The library started with a few boxes, bags, and piles of materials collected by Tucker and Buel during their far-flung travels. As the activities of the organization expanded, Flanakin was hired to create a subject list and database for the collection. Flanakin uses the library collection and her research prowess to respond to several technical assistance requests each week from people around the U.S.

The second resource is the agency’s Web site (ncdsv.org), which was completely overhauled in 2003. Today, ncdsv.org is a far cry from the basic, volunteer-designed site the agency began with five years ago. The new site features clean graphic design and vibrant colors, and the content was redone; new sections were added for law enforcement training, publications, news of interest, a variety of links, news, resources, and more. Since the site is a resource for violence against women issues, it’s constantly updated with new and timely materials, reports, articles, and information. In May of last year, ncdsv.org had 53,000 visits; by the end of September of 2003, that number had risen to more than 84,000.

Recent projects at the National Center include training 911 dispatchers and call-takers to better respond to domestic violence emergencies (see p. 2), and developing and presenting a groundbreaking one-week train-the-trainer program for anti-violence organizations in Mexico. The Mexico training addressed the needs of those starting or expanding shelters for victims of domestic and sexual violence in that country.

Providing customized trainings has also been an important component throughout the history of the agency (starting with Tucker, Buel and Associates). We have presented trainings for the past five years at the annual National College of District Attorneys domestic violence conference; delivered keynote speeches for state coalitions and local service providers; designed and coordinated multi-day conferences for state agencies; trained hundreds of TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) workers and supervisors across Texas; and presented day-long seminars and workshops on a wide array of topics. In addition, the National Center has consulted with numerous communities on their response to domestic violence. In 2000, Tucker facilitated a 10-month strategic planning effort for three agencies in Lincoln, NE: the Lincoln Family Violence Council, Friendship Home, and the Rape Crisis/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center.

The agency’s work has grown from an early focus on conferences and training to encompass much more! Is this where the agency expected to be in 2004? “It’s amazing that within five years, the five cents and the two employees have grown to an agency of 16 staff with an approximate budget of $1 million annually and a notable reputation nationally,” says Gerson. Myers agrees, saying, “I have very high expectations of Debby, so the incredible progress has been what I’ve expected!” And Buel sums up by saying that the progress has been “mind-boggling, incredible, a true testament to Debby’s skill and credibility and reputation throughout the country. I know of no other national program that’s been able to pull as much together in this period of time – one of Debby’s incredible skills is knowing how to pull the right people together and motivate them and make things happen.”