

Assessment of the Problem

Intimate partner violence is one of Miami-Dade County's leading social problems. In 2003, for example, of the 120,697 incidents of domestic violence reported to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Miami-Dade reported the highest number of cases of domestic violence (16,503) among the 67 counties in Florida. With an extraordinarily high level of poverty (31.8%) in our community, young women in Homestead are at almost twice the risk of intimate partner violence as their counterparts throughout Miami-Dade County. According to the Homestead Police Department approximately 60% of the intimate partner violence cases involve individuals in the Hispanic community. Moreover, recent data from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement indicates that between 2005 and 2006 the incidence of intimate partner related homicides and suicides in Homestead increased by 14%.

Although various efforts have been put in place to assist adult victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in the Homestead area, little systematic work has been done to prevent the occurrence of intimate partner violence, particularly as it affects teen relationships. Currently there is a middle school in the area that is implementing a 9 week-therapy oriented intervention for children at high risk for dating violence. The program has not been evaluated. Other local efforts to respond to issues related to teen dating violence include a recent training workshop sponsored by The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment. In December of 2007, the Melissa Institute brought a national expert on teen dating violence to Miami to train professionals and community practitioners, including counselors from the Miami-Dade public schools, on how to develop and implement violence prevention and intervention programs as well as how to respond to youth who might be the victims and perpetrators of such behavior. In addition, the Institute helped the Miami-Dade Police Department produce a training video to help police be better able to respond to victims and investigate teen dating violence.

Community Description

The Homestead area is one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Miami-Dade County and includes the largest group of migrant worker families, approximately 2600, in the County. Thirty-six percent of the population is foreign born. Almost 50% of the Homestead area residents do not have at least a high school diploma. Fifty-seven percent of the population speaks a language other than English, with Spanish accounting for approximately 88% of this non-English speaking group. Overall, 53% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic, 23% as Non-Hispanic White, 21% as Non-Hispanic Black and 3% as other. There is one K-8 grade school and three middle schools in this community. There are approximately 3,700 students ages 10 to 14 enrolled in these schools who will be target of the proposed prevention program. The student population is approximately 64% Hispanic, 28% Non-Hispanic Black, 7% Non-Hispanic White and 1% other. In terms of socioeconomic status, the 2000 Census shows that 31.8% of the 32,046 population of Homestead lived below the poverty level at the time of the Census was completed. However, given the downturn in economic

activity experienced all through South Florida over the past couple of years the actual poverty rate is likely to be considerably higher.

Assets, Opportunities and Challenges for Program Implementation

The proposed **Dating Violence Prevention and Social Action Program (title check)** for Multi-ethnic and Immigrant Youth aims to integrate the assets and resources of a school system interested in dating violence prevention with the assets and resources of 3 community organizations with considerable experience in the area of intimate partner violence prevention, youth development, and civic engagement initiatives. We propose to develop a primary intervention program that targets middle/junior high school students in a multi-ethnic and poverty stricken community. The program will be designed to identify and change maladaptive attitudes about intimate relationships, develop effective social and conflict resolution skills, and prevent verbal and physical aggression in teen dating relationships. We will build on existing knowledge from evidence-based youth prevention program such as the Life Skill Training Program and the Dating Violence Prevention Curriculum (**Cascardi reference needed?**) to create a program responsive to the diverse needs and strengths of Homestead's multi-ethnic youth population. Our goal is to develop a culturally appropriate dating violence prevention curriculum to be implemented in school settings first by members of Miami-Dade school-based services team, and in subsequent years by teachers, counselors, and volunteer trained parents. A second goal of our program is to prepare and guide a smaller number of youth (approximately 10 youth in each of the four schools) to become involved and assume leadership in the prevention of dating violence in Homestead. Youth participating in this part of the project will develop community projects to disseminate information to their peers about dating violence and enlist the support of parents and other community organizations to support their efforts. The specific structure of the program will be agreed upon by the project partners with direct input from approximately 20 youth and 6 parents who will work with our curriculum development team during the initial 6-month planning phase.

This prevention effort is an extension of the work currently done by The Melissa Institute, *En Familia*, and the School of Education at the University of Miami in the areas of violence prevention and youth development. The collaboration brings to this a wealth of experience on domestic violence research and practice, development of youth programs, and successful community-based partnerships. The inclusion of the Miami-Dade Public Schools in this effort not only assures access to the target student population but signals the potential for important policy changes to occur as a result of this collaboration. Some of the challenges ahead include the adaptation of evidence-based interventions to meet the needs a multi-ethnic community (e.g., addressing divergent cultural beliefs and attitudes about how girls/women and boys/men should behave in intimate relationships) as well as the challenges of dealing with a large migrant community. However, we view these challenges as opportunities to contribute both to the well-being our youth in Homestead and to enhance the utility of the dating violence prevention literature for ethnically diverse communities.

Agency Description

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to prevent violence and promote safe communities through education and application of research-based knowledge. It was established in honor of the memory of Melissa Aptman who was murdered in St. Louis in 1995, two weeks before her graduation from Washington University. Over the thirteen years of its existence, the institute, through its staff and scientific board of international experts in violence prevention has educated professionals and engaged in community and school consultations in many areas related to the prevention and response to youth violence in urban settings, domestic partner/intimate partner violence, bullying in schools, and treatment of traumatized children and adolescents. In recent months the Institute organized a conference for professionals including school personnel on Dating Violence amongst youth. It also helped the Miami-Dade Police Department develop a training video for its officers on how to respond to dating violence. In recognition to the Institute's work and level of expertise, The American Psychological Association designated it as a regional training site for its program entitled Adults and Children Together Against Violence (ACT Against Violence). This program trains childcare and mental health professionals to deliver an enhanced parent education curriculum. The history of The Melissa Institute's work in collaborating with other community agencies and the school system to prevent and respond to youth violence makes it uniquely qualified in leading the Building Healthy Teen Relationships program partnership. **(Is this the name?)**

Partnership Description

Along with the Melissa Institute, there are three collaborating partners for this project. They are *en Familia*, Inc., the University of Miami School of Education and the Miami-Dade County School Division of Student Services. The Melissa Institute is currently collaborating with the University of Miami School of Education and the Miami-Dade County Schools Division of Student Services to provide professional development and consultation to the Young Women's Academy for Civic And Academic Development at J.R.E. Lee School, an alternative public school for girls with behavior problems in grades 6-12.

En Familia, Inc. is a non-profit, multi-faceted Art and Family Education Center whose mission is to build healthy family relationships, examine and preserve cultural values and enrich the quality of life through education and the arts. Its focus is to provide educational programs to help improve and preserve family life for a large population of migrant farm workers and low income-families living in the southern part of Miami-Dade Country. It uses its partnerships with 22 agencies that include Community Based and Community of Faiths organizations to access and engage the families. Among its projects for children, it serves approximately 350 middle school students and 60 high school students annually. In addition, the agency works in collaboration with 8 local after school program (about 1000 students) and implements parent and student

leadership programs at the schools. *En Familia* was awarded the Florida Governor's "Peace at Home" Award for stopping domestic violence. Of particular relevant to the proposed project, En Familia has a much expertise in educating and engaging youth in out of school settings. For example, EnFamilia is currently a partner with UM School of Education in the *Art-in-Action Experience* summer program designed to provide youth with dance, drama, music, poetry, playwriting, film and visual art workshops during the months of June and July as alternatives to the drug abuse, violence, and crime scenes so present in our community.

The University of Miami School of Education has a long history of community collaboration aimed at improving the quality of education and nurturing teachers and leaders in community well-being. In the most recent Academic Analytics rankings, the School of Education program in the fields of Evaluation and Research Methods and Education and Professional Development were among the top four programs in the nation. Of particular relevance for the proposed project is the work done in the areas of domestic violence and positive youth development with ethnic minority youth populations by Dr. Etiony Aldarondo, the School's Associate Dean for Research and Director of the Office for Research in Educational and Community Well-Being. He is nationally known for his research and advocacy efforts on behalf of battered women and immigrant families. Dr. Aldarondo is a board member and past co-chair for the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence. In addition, he is a leading partner in the Immigrant Children Legal and Services Partnership which aims to promote the human rights and promote the well-being of unaccompanied immigrant children in South Florida. The school has been successful in educating teachers and helping to change social policy as it relates to youth development.

The third partner in our collaboration is the Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Student Services. Among other services, they provide TRUST Specialists to the schools in the county. The TRUST Specialist, as a member of the school-based student services team, is responsible for assisting all students in developing their potential to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. They facilitate the acquisition of competencies by students in the areas of personal/social, educational, health, community and career development. They are the lead member of the student services team in organizing all efforts to reduce substance abuse, bullying and violence in the schools. The student services division has a long history and success in educating and engaging youth in school settings.

Track Record

Over the last three years, The Melissa Institute has initiated a program entitled "Silence the Violence" combining a public education program with public policy. This program has been a series of conference in which national experts in violence prevention and response have been brought together with local policy makers, elected officials, academic, school administrators and teachers, health care professionals and service providers. At the last conference in 2007, entitled "Silence the Violence II: Youth Violence in Urban America", national experts including the Director of the Division of

Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control, the Director of a CDC funded Center of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention at the University of California, Riverside and a national expert on Gang Violence from the Arizona State University met with local stakeholders to discuss evidence-based approaches to dealing with Youth Violence. The Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court was also a speaker at the conference. The need for this conference was, in part, based on local police and health statistics indicating a recent increase in community violence perpetrated by and upon youth. Two concrete results came from the conference. First, the Chief Judge of the local 11th Judicial Circuit asked The Melissa Institute for help in developing an interagency task force to address the problem of youth violence. A second outcome was that the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court asked The Melissa Institute for and was provided with the most recent evidence-based curriculum in judicial sponsored civic education for a state-wide intervention in the schools. The essential element that lead to the success of this initiative included the ability of The Melissa Institute to identify, collaborate and facilitate the participation of multiple stakeholders. In particular, The Institute was able to identify the key individuals and organizations that could be instrumental in making policy changes. One lesson learned from these conferences is that there needs to be follow-up with organizations to help facilitate actions inspired by the conferences. The follow-up activities, including developing problem solving strategies around barriers to change have been the essential skills learned from these activities. These skills will help our collaboration be better able to address possible challenges for this initiative.

Addressing Intervention Needs as They Arise

Raising the awareness of youth, their families and community organizations about dating and sexual violence may lead to increased identification of individuals who are both the perpetrators and victims. It may also lead to discussions of other kinds of family violence, including child abuse and neglect. As a result there may need to be more training for individuals, including law enforcement and health care professionals in how to respond. In addition, there may also be the need for more services. The collaborating organizations are prepared to initiate further training and help other organizations expand their services to meet the needs that may arise.

Evaluation

The Melissa Institute, the UM School of Education, and EnFamilia all have been involved in a number of evaluations and community assessments of educational and training programs. Examples of these include evaluations of changes in attitudes and knowledge of children about bullying in school as a result of the bullying intervention program, of interventions to improve reading abilities in elementary school children, of healthy marriage programs, and of intervention programs for men who batter their female partners.

The Healthy Teen Relationship program provides a unique challenge for evaluation of its work. Along with the process evaluation of its ongoing performance and outcomes

that involve changes of knowledge and attitudes as a result of participation in the program, it will also require long term outcome evaluation as to whether behavior changes have occurred in the community of children who have participated in the project. Longitudinal contact with children and youth is never easy and we can expect to be a bit more challenging given the large number of migrant families in Homestead. . This challenge will require that multiple agencies as well as the schools be involved in designing how the data can best be collected. It will also require working with the RWJ evaluation team to insure that adequate resources are allocated for this purpose.

Sustainability

The Melissa Institute, the UM School of Education, and *En Familia* have a proven track record for the successful completion of funded initiatives and training programs related to violence prevention. Our interest in violence prevention did not emerge in response to this call for proposals and will continue well after the funding is over. Our hope is that the results of this intervention would provide evidence for the effectiveness of a culture sensitive dating violence curriculum and social action program, which would lead to meaningful policy changes regarding the role that the Miami-Dade School System can play in the prevention of dating violence and intimate partner violence in our community.