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'NO QUICK FIX' ON AGGRESSION

ANDREA ROBINSON AND YAHNILET COLON, arobinson@MiamiHerald.com

Popular tactics used to deter youth crime such as boot camps, gun buybacks and short-term job training programs are among the least effective in reducing violence, a researcher from a Miami-based violence prevention organization said Friday.

Also ineffective is the arrest of juveniles for minor offenses, because that leads to contact with the criminal justice system, said Donald Meichenbaum, research director at the Melissa Institute.

FROM THE FRONT LINE

He shared his report, which drew from numerous research papers and articles, at a private meeting in Kendall with frontline professionals who deal with at-risk children and teenagers on a regular basis.

At least 25 children age 18 and under have died in gun-related violence in Miami-Dade County over the last 15 months. That alarming number prompted the Melissa Institute to initiate a comprehensive dialogue.

"The perpetrators are hardly older than the victims," said Suzanne **Keeley**, a psychologist and institute president. "This transcends all differences that we may have because the children in our community are in danger."

What does reduce violence, Meichenbaum said, is extended programs that identify and treat aggressive behaviors and mental health, mentoring programs and relocating families from high-risk environments into better neighborhoods.

He noted that boot camps and similar methods can be effective if they are paired with longer term mentoring or anti-bullying programs. He warned that programs that separate "high risk" youth from other children may inadvertently increase violent behavior among the high-risk group.

"There are no quick fixes," Meichenbaum said.

KENDALL SYMPOSIUM

The Melissa Institute, a nonprofit organization, co-sponsored the symposium along with Baptist Children's Hospital. Participants included educators, police officers, attorneys, ministers and social service specialists; among them were Dade schools Superintendent Rudy Crew and Public Defender Bennett Brummer.

Community leaders also heard from Modesto Abety, president and chief executive officer of The Children's Trust.

Abety reminded participants of the Trust's promise to allocate \$9 million for an initiative over three years to organizations that work to prevent youth violence. The grants will be allocated in five regions: Carol City, Opa-locka and Miami Gardens; Liberty City and Brownsville; Little Haiti and North Miami; Overtown; and Goulds and West Perrine.

Adrienne Arsht, institute board member, said the information presented could influence the efforts of community organizations that compete for the money - and eventually parents and children - to craft programs that address "the scientifically determined causes of violence."

"Shackles don't work, boot camps don't work," Arsht said. "Let's take those off the table. The data don't support those solutions."

Many in the audience questioned the involvement of different sectors of the community, especially faith-based organizations.

Anthony Dawkins, a pastor from Project HOPE Outreach Ministries in Liberty City, said religious leaders need to be involved.

"We know who's toting the guns. We know that grandmama is selling crack down the street," Dawkins said. "We can help the police shut down every drug house on our block."

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