



The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment



2015 Report to the Community

SYNERGY

November 2014

Dear Friends:

Change is inevitable but it often generates opportunities to create great new synergies. For 18 years, The Melissa Institute was fortunate to be located within a Baptist Health South Florida office. However, growth there necessitated a move. Fortunately, we were invited by our colleagues at the University of Miami's School of Education and Human Development to move our office into their Community and Educational Well-being (CEW) Research Center. We are especially grateful to Scientific Board members Isaac Prilleltensky, dean of the school, and Etiony Aldarondo, director of the center, who, with this move, have opened up new opportunities for collaboration. Our mission to promote safer communities is perfectly aligned with the university, and we know that this endeavor will benefit society both locally and nationally.

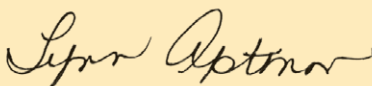
The Melissa Institute remains an independent 501(c)3 charitable entity. We will continue to expand our work to prevent bullying, improve parenting skills through the ACT program and offer conferences, symposiums, workshops and consultations. We supported a pro bono project conducted by the Boston Consulting Group to identify the location of violent youth crimes in Miami-Dade County, which aided the police and Miami-Dade Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho in finding ways to stem the tide of violence surrounding our schools. Our reading website, readingteacher.net, helped to educate well over 200 visitors per day. Our websites melissainstitute.org and teachsafeschools.org generated over 2.5 million hits last year. Our Facebook page helped educate three-quarters of a million people this year on our mission, especially in the area of gun violence prevention.

Research has shown that the majority of prisoners are functionally illiterate and that the earlier language and reading are introduced, the more likely it is that it will create literate and productive citizens. We initiated an exciting project to encourage early literacy by providing a bilingual book to every new mother at Homestead Hospital and informing them on the importance of reading to their babies and children.

Our move to the University of Miami is a positive one, but it has resulted in increased operating costs. We desperately need your financial support NOW more than ever. Please give generously so that The Melissa Institute can continue to provide its expertise in educating new leaders in the field of violence prevention, thereby promoting the reduction of violence in our society.

Thank you for your donation. It enables us to make positive changes to prevent the epidemic of violence that threatens us all.

Sincerely,



Lynn Aptman
Founder and President



Michael Aptman, M.D.
Founder

A New Home!

Summer is the time when many families move, and that was true this year for The Melissa Institute family. The Institute left its South Miami home of many years for the University of Miami campus, where it is now housed at the School of Education and Human Development's Community and Educational Well-being (CEW) Research Center in Coral Gables.

"We're delighted about our move to UM," said Lynn Aptman, the Institute's president and one of its founders. "The Institute remains an independent, not-for-profit entity, but there will be many opportunities for the Institute to collaborate with the university on projects of mutual interest. The resulting synergy of our joint efforts is truly exciting."

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., director of the CEW and a member of the Scientific Board of The Melissa Institute, and Dean Isaac Prilleltensky, Ph.D., who is also a Scientific Board member, were instrumental in bringing the Institute to the UM campus. "It's a natural step," Dr. Aldarondo said. "I've seen The Melissa Institute grow and develop, and now we can work closely together on research initiatives and get students engaged in the Institute."

The University has agreed to provide two student interns to help with Institute programs, and the Institute has agreed to provide at least one scholarship for a UM doctoral student studying a violence-related topic. This year's Belfer-Aptman Scholars Award went to Amelia Swanson, for research on her dissertation "Post-traumatic Growth Among Latina Victims of Interpersonal Violence in Psychological Treatment."

Dr. Aldarondo also envisions inviting members of The Melissa Institute's prestigious Scientific Board to serve as co-investigators on UM-funded research projects. "There are so many possibilities for collaboration," he said. "We can work together to disseminate the latest information relating to violence, providing experts for interviews and writing opinion pieces for the media."

The UM campus will also provide settings for The Melissa Institute's educational conferences for professionals and students alike.

Ms. Aptman said that the long-time work of the Institute relating to bullying prevention, parenting training, consulting services and literacy will continue.

"Change is invigorating," she said. "And we're moving full steam ahead."



Focusing on Youth Safety

The mass shooting of school children in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012 galvanized many communities across the nation to do more to ensure safer schools. Miami-Dade was no exception. Mayor Carlos Gimenez and School Superintendent Alberto Carvalho convened the Roundtable on Youth Safety. Meeting with the county's police chiefs and mayors and dozens of other interested organizations, they formed four working groups to recommend ways to improve youth safety, both in and out of school.

The Melissa Institute brought the prestigious Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to the table. BCG had conducted a detailed study in Chicago of crime hot spots, school safety practices and victim risk factors. They offered to do the same, without charge, for Miami-Dade.

"The BCG data analysis was very helpful," said Lisa Martinez, formerly Mayor Gimenez's chief of staff and the person tasked by the mayor to oversee the Roundtable's work. "They brought together facts and data points from

various sources," creating a clear picture of problematic neighborhoods. The data also demonstrated the typical characteristics of student victims of violent crime, and modeled who is at highest risk. About 80 percent of the "ultra-high-risk" students were clustered at 22 schools.

One important result of the Roundtable on Youth Safety is better communication and working relationships among various government agencies, according to Ms. Martinez. "For example, we see the police and Parks Department working together more closely to provide safer environments outside of school. In fact, schools are the safest place for our youth," she added. "Much of the challenge lies outside of school."

"The synergy of so many groups and individuals working toward a common goal — safer schools and neighborhoods for our children — was striking," said Lynn Aptman, president of The Melissa Institute. "We were proud to be part of this effort."



Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez addresses the first Roundtable on Youth Safety meeting at Vizcaya.

By the NUMBERS

Bullying prevention programs • 11, attended by more than 700 students and adults

ACT Raising Safe Kids classes • More than 300 parents of young children attended in the southeast region

Consultations • Numerous, including three days of presentations by Scientific Board member Jim Larson, Ph.D., to Miami-Dade school faculty on anger and aggression management of children and adolescents, as well as new concepts on motivating positive student behavior

Melissa Institute Facebook page • 8,578 new "likes"; 721,014 people reached

www.readingteacher.net • 175,344 unique visitors to the Institute's website for teachers of early readers, an average of 225 per day. The YouTube channel housing reading videos has had 933,074 video views, and has 2,589 subscribers

Books for Babies

Research shows that 85 percent of incarcerated juvenile offenders cannot read. Because of the importance of early literacy, The Melissa Institute has begun a new program: Books for Babies.

“The Institute is donating books to new mothers at Homestead Hospital, to encourage them to start reading to their babies as soon as possible,” said Karyn Cunningham, Institute vice president. “The book is *Curious George*, which is a children’s classic. And it’s a bilingual edition, so parents can read to their children in their own language.”

The idea for the books project came from Board member Joan Gluck, M.D., a retired pediatric allergist. The first 400 books have already been delivered to the hospital. The Institute hopes the community will embrace the Books for Babies program. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to the Institute office, 1507 Levante Ave., Suite 331, Coral Gables, FL 33146. Mark your check “Books for Babies.”



Baby Garrett Upthegrove is not exactly enthralled as mom Jaimi Upthegrove reads to him at Homestead Hospital.



BULLYING PREVENTION

About 150 fourth and fifth grade students from 14 elementary schools attended the Institute’s 11th annual conference on bullying prevention in October. Facilitators were Palmetto counselor Julie Astuto and Trish Ramsay, the Institute’s education director.

Gun Sense in Short Supply

Although nothing can match the horror of the mass shooting of school children in Newtown, Conn., there were at least 44 school shootings in the 14 months following the Newtown killings, according to the organization Everytown for Gun Safety. A scientific poll commissioned by The Melissa Institute last year showed that South Florida residents overwhelmingly support changes in gun regulation, with strong support even among members of the National Rifle Association. Ninety percent of South Floridians favor background checks for all gun purchases and 86 percent support requiring gun owners to register their firearms. The South Florida results closely track national surveys on gun issues.

With that much support, you’d expect to see a flurry of legislative action to pass gun laws. “Sadly, not much has been accomplished since Newtown,” said Michael Aptman, M.D., a Melissa Institute founder. “In fact, Florida has passed five pro-gun measures this year, according to the website guns.com,” he said.

What can ordinary citizens do to see that Congress and the states act on the citizen demand for safer gun laws? “We have to take it to the ballot box,” Dr. Aptman said. “We have to vote for candidates who support common-sense gun laws that also protect the Second Amendment.” Go to the everytown.org website to learn more.

“It’s been nearly two decades since a gun took our daughter Melissa’s life,” Dr. Aptman said. “What progress have we made? Americans don’t have to tolerate 31,000 deaths from gun violence every year. We must demand sensible gun laws. And we must bolster evidence-based programs to help families whose members have mental health issues.”



Applying the Lessons Learned

For 18 years, The Melissa Institute has presented an annual conference for teachers, school counselors, social workers, therapists, law enforcement personnel and others to provide evidence-based information on ways to prevent and treat violence. At the May 2 conference, Melissa Institute Scientific Director Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., joined psychologists Steve Dykstra, Ph.D., of Milwaukee and Scott Miller, Ph.D., of Phoenix in discussing community-based interventions that have proven successful.



Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D. (right), presents the Community Service Award to Carlos Salgado and Rocio Tafur-Salgado.

EnFAMILIA Honored

Carlos Salgado and Rocio Tafur-Salgado, founders and directors of EnFAMILIA, were honored with the Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D., Community Service Award at the Institute’s annual conference. EnFAMILIA provides educational programs, including ACT Raising Safe Kids, for parents in English and Spanish. The group focuses on migrant workers and low-income families in deep south Miami-Dade County, helping parents to understand ways they can protect children from violent influences in society.



Scott Miller, Ph.D., professor of behavioral health at Arizona State University, described ways to improve outcomes of psychotherapy.



Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Scientific Director of The Melissa Institute, has organized 18 annual conferences to provide evidence-based research on violence prevention.

Peace Under the Stars

A stunning array of jewelry, trips, wine, sports tickets plus much more awaited guests bidding in the silent auction at this year's Peace, Harmony and Moonlight fundraiser. Energetic Grace Carricarte chaired the auction for the sixth time. Her hard-working committee amassed 218 items, which contributed \$25,000 toward the evening's net proceeds of nearly \$72,000. About 230 guests dined in the peaceful Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden setting, and enjoyed moonlit tram tours of the garden.



Founders Dr. Michael and Lynn Aptman (left to right), Auction Chair Grace Carricarte, President Emeritus Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., and Natasha and Philipp Ludwig, co-chairs of the event.



Board member Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., and his son Diego, a talented saxophonist who provided some of the evening's "harmony."



Long-time supporter Amy Halsey joined Miami-Dade School Board member Larry Feldman (center) and Peter Ulrich, BCG managing partner.

Join the Fun!
Peace, Harmony and Moonlight
March 19, 2015



Board member Maggie Snyder (left) and her husband, Aaron, with Lisa Goldberg, Honorary Board member.



School Superintendent Alberto Carvalho praised The Melissa Institute for its work in preventing violence.



Young Professionals members Grace Carricarte (left) and Amanda Keeley enjoyed the peaceful Fairchild Garden environs.

To view more photos of Peace and Harmony, go to melissainstitute.org.

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2015 Community Report

Editor and Writer: Jo Baxter; Graphic Designer: Denise Winston; Photographer: Mabel Rodriguez; Copy Editor: Dorothy Stein



Anahi Jimenez, 10 years old,
 Shenandoah Elementary



Amalia Suros, 8 years old,
 Tucker Elementary



Yuliett Pulido, 9 years old,
 Tucker Elementary

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. The Institute was established by Melissa Aptman's family and friends a year after her death. Our continuing efforts reflect the belief that each of us has the power to effect change and that we must work together for the betterment of our society.

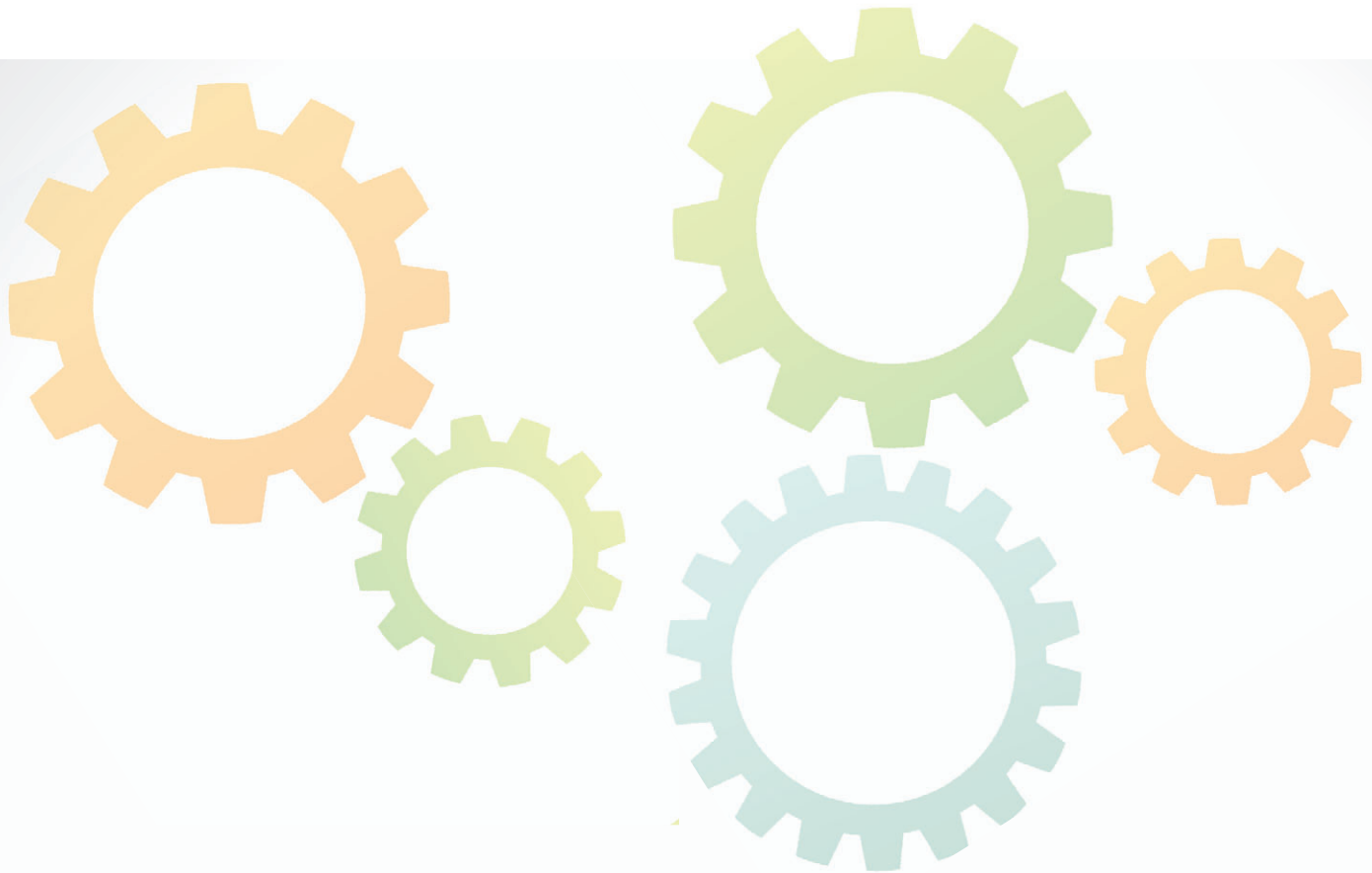


Melissa Aptman

The Institute's mission is to prevent violence and promote safer communities through education and application of research-based knowledge.

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For Violence Prevention and Treatment

Located at the University of Miami, School of Education and Human Development

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