Report to the Community 2003

The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment
Too often we hear of the tragic consequences of violence. This anecdote has a different ending. A teenager, in crisis, planned to kill her mother. She knew where the family handgun was kept. However, when she tried to pull the trigger, the gun wouldn’t fire. It was secured with a trigger lock. It was later learned that the safety lock on that gun was one of the many distributed for free by The Melissa Institute. A life was saved.

In May 1995, Melissa Aptman was murdered during a carjacking in St. Louis. It was just two weeks before her college graduation. A bright and gifted young woman, Melissa was the victim of a random and senseless crime.

Days before her death, Melissa wrote about violence against women on a college final exam. “Such acts attempt to break the human spirit and destroy the state of mind of those involved,” she wrote. “In spite of the brutality imposed on them, women almost always find some source of strength.”

Melissa’s family has drawn strength from her words. A year after her death, her family, friends and violence prevention experts established The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. The Institute is dedicated to the study and prevention of violence. We are committed to peace.

**Our mission:** The mission of The Melissa Institute is to bridge the gap between research findings and the direct application of that information to reduce the incidence of violence and to assist victims and their families. The Institute fulfills this mission through education, community service, research support and consultation.
Bullying, according to research, is a major contributing factor to incidents of violence, particularly school violence. Incidents like the school shooting at Columbine in Littleton, Colorado, illustrate how serious the consequences can be when bullying is left unchecked. The Melissa Institute presented a four-day education series on bullying for professionals and the community. The series included Pediatric Grand Rounds at the University of Miami, a workshop for school counselors, a presentation to middle school administrators, a community education program for parents, and seminars for elementary school teachers and preschool directors.

The Institute again hosted the second annual Youth Conference on Bullying. This was facilitated by Debra J. Pepler, Ph.D., who is an international expert on childhood aggression and a member of the Institute’s Scientific Board. Students and faculty from area middle schools learned about bullying and its impact on the school environment. They also discussed plans for preventing bullying at their schools.

Second Step

The Melissa Institute recognizes the importance of bringing leading experts as well as research-based violence prevention programs to our community. Research shows that aggressive behavior in children predicts later delinquency, substance abuse, depression, school dropout and early parenthood. The Melissa Institute selected Ponce de Leon Middle School, Coral Gables, as a pilot site for the implementation of Second Step, a nationally recognized school violence prevention curriculum. It is a primary prevention program aimed at reducing aggression and promoting positive social skills in children.

Ponce Middle School was chosen because of its diverse student population, school leadership and innovative peer mediation/conflict resolution programs. The Institute provided funding for faculty members to attend an intensive three-day Second Step training. Those faculty members serve as the school site coordinators for the program. In addition, the Institute funded on-site training sessions for faculty members. The Institute also purchased comprehensive manuals and support materials for program implementation. Second Step has been widely acclaimed by the Journal of the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association.
Annual Conference

On the first Friday in May, more than 300 professionals gather for what has become the Institute’s signature educational event – the annual conference. Consistent with the Institute’s mission, national and international experts present leading-edge research to frontline practitioners such as teachers and principals, counselors and social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists, health professionals, police officers, judges, religious leaders and policy makers. The sixth annual conference, “Anger-Control and Aggressive Behaviors: A Life-span Treatment Approach,” featured violence prevention experts Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., and James Larson, Ph.D.

May 2003 – The seventh annual conference will focus on “Trauma, Children and Their Families.”

New York Conference

In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and a request from the New York community for assistance, The Melissa Institute sponsored a conference for professionals at Adelphi University. The conference, “Trauma, Children and Their Families: Focus on the Preschool Years,” included presentations on various forms of trauma, including child maltreatment, violence and neglect. Experts also addressed strategies for helping and strengthening children and families affected by the 9-11 tragedy. The Institute’s New York fundraiser helped to make this conference possible.

Who Dies?

- **March 2002** – A 15-year-old girl shot herself in the bedroom with her mother’s gun. She had been upset about breaking up with her boyfriend. (Homestead)
- **March 2000** – A three-year-old girl fatally shot herself in the chest with her father’s gun, left unlocked on top of the entertainment center. (North Miami)
- **March 1999** – A 14-year-old boy shot himself in the head with his father’s gun after an argument with his parents. (Southwest Miami-Dade)

Community Service

Making our community a safer place for children and families requires education, public awareness and involvement. The Melissa Institute provides programs for parents, makes presentations to students and participates in a variety of health and safety fairs. Further, the Institute, with Baptist Children’s Hospital and Miami-Dade Police Department, has distributed more than 100,000 bookmarks that have a family-friendly message about gun safety. Plus, thousands of free gun locks have been given away along with materials about violence prevention.

In addition, the Institute also provided funding to support the implementation of the Early Childhood Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) at South Miami Hospital’s Child Development Center. This parent and caregiver program provides training to improve family communication, encourage cooperation and provide effective discipline strategies that promote self-esteem and mutual respect. Violence prevention information was also incorporated into the curriculum. The family-focused program emphasizes the need for early intervention and its vital role in the prevention of abusive and violent behavior.

The Melissa Institute’s website is a work in progress and continues to be developed as an online resource center for violence prevention information. As it evolves, the site will feature materials from our conferences, updates about events and activities, links to other sites as well as promising research. Visit us at www.melissainstitute.org.

Another important part of the Institute’s service to the community is supporting student and family literacy initiatives. There is a strong link between literacy and violence prevention. In fact, about 85 percent of juvenile offenders are illiterate. To enhance the literacy efforts of Sylvania Heights Elementary School in West Miami, the Institute made a generous donation for reading materials. The Melissa Institute has also provided workshops, training and consultation to improve literacy programs.

The Institute has distributed more than 100,000 gun safety bookmarks throughout South Florida. They are available in English and Spanish.

**Kids and Guns Don’t Mix Safety Tips for Parents**

If you keep a gun:
- Always keep it locked up with a gun lock.
- Lock and store bullets separately.

Even if you don’t own a gun:
- Talk to your children about guns.
- Ask parents of your children’s friends if they have guns at home and how they are stored.

**Love your kids. Lock your gun.**

“I want to express my admiration for the work you have done through The Melissa Institute. I also feel a very close tie to the work the St. Louis alumnae club has done to endow the Sign of the Arrow Melissa Scholarship. The young women who benefit from the scholarship with Melissa’s name will honor her life and memory with grace and dignity.”

— Kay Schiller Hyde, Executive Director, Pi Beta Phi Foundation

Melissa was active with the Pi Beta Phi sorority. More than $10,000 in scholarships has been distributed by the Foundation to deserving students.
Research Support and Awards

Community Service Award
This award recognizes an individual whose work, dedication and contributions to the community are consistent with the Institute’s mission to reduce violence and assist victims.

- 2002 - Patrick “Pat” Morris, Vice President, Community and Public Affairs, VISTA Healthplan and Chairman, Hands On Miami.
- 2001 - Judge Tom Petersen, retired from the Juvenile Division of Miami-Dade County Circuit Court.

Education Recognition Award
This award brings recognition and financial support to a school or an administrator, teacher or counselor working to reduce the incidence of violent behavior and to promote a peaceful school environment.

- 2002 - Centennial Middle School, Miami-Dade County Public Schools Region VI, Elvoyd Fischer, Principal, and Carol Brown, Assistant Principal.

Norma Bossard Literacy Award
Named in memory of Norma Bossard, who supervised language arts and reading programs for Miami-Dade schools for many years. The award is given to a local reading professional for outstanding efforts to promote student and family literacy.

- 2002 - Marilyn Wolfson, Milam K-8 Center
- 2001 - Libby Miller, Claude Pepper Elementary School
- 2000 - Lois Magnus, Madison Middle School

Scholarships
Young scientists who are studying in the field of violence prevention represent the hope and promise of a more peaceful future. The Melissa Institute offers $1,500 scholarships to assist doctoral students in furthering their academic research and promoting their important work. The awards are used to defray costs of conducting research. Past winners include:

- 2002 - Alissa Glickman, University of Miami, “Parental Monitoring of Children Exposed to Community Violence: Predicting Externalizing Behaviors.”
- 2002 - Negar Mahmoodzadegan, University of Virginia, “The Relationship of Childhood Abuse Histories to Peer Conflict for Women in Prison.”
- 2001 - Nicole Eldridge Marcus, University of Miami, “Dimensions of Marital Aggression and Children’s Aggressive Schemas in Clinic-Referred Families.”
- 2000 - Mark Bodnarchuk, University of British Columbia, “Psychological and Behavioral Typologies of Men Who Batter.”
- 1999 - Janine Saunders, University of Texas at Austin, “Exposure to Chronic Community Violence in African-American Children: Kinship and Spirituality Factors.”

From left: Milam K-8 Center Principal Robert Valenzuela, award winner Marilyn Wolfson, Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., President of the Institute, and Alicia Moreyra, Ph.D., Language Arts/Reading, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

From left: Judge Norman Gerstein, Institute Board member, scholarship winner Alissa Glickman, Assistant Principal Carol Brown and Principal Elvoyd Fischer, Centennial Middle School, and Patrick “Pat” Morris, recipient of Community Service Award.
Consultation

The Melissa Institute provides consultation to individuals, community agencies and schools on violence prevention and intervention. The Institute taps the expertise of its Scientific Board and their many colleagues to provide sound, research-based advice on effective violence prevention strategies. For example, the Institute has consulted with individuals and organizations about the importance of early childhood literacy and its role in violence prevention. A local private school also requested the Institute’s guidance on its bullying prevention initiatives.

While there are numerous violence prevention programs, not all are proven to be effective. In fact, research demonstrates that some activities may result in increasing violent behavior and causing more harm than good. The Melissa Institute aims to ensure that decisions concerning violence prevention and treatment are informed ones, based upon research.

Fundraising Events

Peace & Harmony 2002 and 2003

Every year several hundred guests attend The Melissa Institute’s fundraiser “Peace & Harmony.” The 2002 dinner and concert was the most successful to date, raising more than $60,000 for the Institute’s projects and programs. Chris Calloway, daughter of jazz legend Cab Calloway, wowed the crowd with her amazing voice, edgy wit and spirited rendition of her father’s trademark song “Hi-De-Ho.” In 2003, jazz vocalist Allan Harris is back by popular demand. Harris is hot on the New York jazz scene and returns to Miami for the Institute’s event.

“An Evening with Friends” 2002

On a cool, beautiful summer evening in Manhattan, friends and classmates of Melissa’s came together for the second annual New York fundraising event. “An Evening with Friends” raised over $10,000 and increased awareness about violence prevention and The Melissa Institute. Special thanks to event co-chairs Julie Koplon Schanzer and Debra Warren and the committee for their generosity and caring spirits. The event was a tremendous success!

Chris Calloway (above) delighted the audience with creative renditions of jazz standards.

(Above) From left: Debra Warren, Jara Shapiro, Julie Koplon Schanzer and Christine Kotler at "An Evening with Friends" in New York.

(Above) From left: Co-chairs Richard Elias Jr. and Elizabeth Ritter are joined by Lynn and Michael Aptman, M.D., at the 2002 Peace & Harmony Concert.

(Left) From left: Co-chairs Richard Elias Jr. and Elizabeth Ritter are joined by Lynn and Michael Aptman, M.D., at the 2002 Peace & Harmony Concert.
You Can Help

Your contribution enables The Melissa Institute to continue providing education, community service, research support and consultation. Donations may be directed to the general fund or earmarked for a specific project or program. A donation is also a unique way to mark special occasions or honor individuals and families. Please join us in making our world a safer place.

☐ Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution in the amount of
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☐ $5,000-$9,999 to be a Fellow.
☐ $2,500-$4,999 to be a Patron.
☐ $1,000-$2,499 to be a Benefactor.
☐ $500-$999 to be a Sponsor.
☐ $50-$499 to be a Friend.
☐ Other ____________
☐ I am interested in helping by donating stocks, property or other assets.
☐ Please send me a Wishes for Peace & Harmony coupon book to make donations in honor/in memory of loved ones.

Please make check payable to:
The Melissa Institute
6200 SW 73 Street
Miami, FL 33143

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Thank you for your support!

Did You Know?

☐ According to the University of Miami, in 2001 there were 237 gun-related deaths in Miami-Dade County. At least 47 minors were shot and 10 died.

☐ On a typical day, six or seven youth are killed in the U.S., mostly inner-city, minority youth.

☐ Over the past decade, homicide rates among adolescents have increased dramatically. The increase is almost entirely attributed to homicides involving guns.

OUR VOLUNTEER BOARDS
Without the participation, expertise and leadership of our volunteer Boards, the Institute could not accomplish its goals. The Boards include the Board of Directors, Scientific Board and Honorary Board.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Committed individuals who volunteer their time to oversee the operation of the Institute, assist with fundraising, plan projects and represent the organization at community events.

Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., is President and a founder of The Melissa Institute. She is a psychologist in private practice and on the medical staff of Baptist and South Miami Hospitals. She has extensive clinical experience in treating victims and perpetrators of violence.

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor Emeritus, clinical psychologist, Research Director and a founder of The Melissa Institute.

Modesto Abety, MPA, Director, Children’s Services Council of Miami-Dade County.

Petey Adams, Vice President, SunTrust Bank.

Lynn APTMAN, M.Ed., Melissa’s mother, one of the founders and Director of Information Services.

Michael APTMAN, M.D., Melissa’s father, neurologist and one of the founders of the Institute.

Robyn Cassel, Esq., past Treasurer, former nurse and dedicated community volunteer.

Penn Chabrow, Esq., Director, Wampler Buchanan Walker Chabrow & Banciella, P.A.

Judge Norman Gerstein, Circuit Court Judge, Miami-Dade County.

Remi J. Kajogbola, MBA, Treasurer of the Institute and Corporate Region Vice President, Cardinal Health.

Judge Orlando Prescott, County Court for the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida.

Elizabeth Ritter, Esq., attorney in private practice.


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SCIENTIFIC BOARD
This board is comprised of international experts in the areas of violence prevention and treatment of victims.

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and Research Director of The Melissa Institute. He is one of the founders of cognitive-behavior therapy. In a survey reported in American Psychologist, he was voted “one of the 10 most influential psychotherapists of the century.” He has published extensively, and his most recent book is Treatment of Individuals with Anger-control Problems and Aggressive Behavior. Other books include Treating Adults with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Nurturing Independent Learners, and Stress Inoculation Training.

James Larson, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology and Director of the School of Psychology Training Program at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. His recent book is Helping School Children Cope with Anger: A Cognitive-behavioral Intervention. He has more than 25 years’ experience with the study and treatment of anger-related behaviors in children and youth. He was a school psychologist with the Milwaukee Public Schools for 14 years and directed its violence prevention program.

Clifford O’Donnell, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology at the University of Hawaii and Director of the Community Studies Program. He is an authority on childhood aggression and violence, and he has addressed the issue of gun violence and youth. He has also developed culturally sensitive community programs for youth and their families.

Debra Pepler, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology at York University, Toronto, Ontario, and Director of the Judy LaMarsh Center for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution. She is an internationally recognized expert on bullying and childhood aggression and an authority on school-based interventions. She speaks widely to professional and community audiences and publishes extensively. She was honored with the Contribution to Knowledge Award from the Psychology Foundation of Canada.

Barbara Hanna Wasik, Ph.D., is Professor of Education at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Director of the UNC Center for Home Visiting. She is a pioneer and leading authority in the area of home visiting. Her book Home Visiting: Procedures for Helping Families is a classic in the field. She has consulted internationally on home visiting and early intervention programs.

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*We apologize for any errors or omissions due to printer’s deadline. Please inform us if we inadvertently omitted your name.*
Gun Violence

Reading, writing and arithmetic,
Not running wild with guns and sticks.
Children of the world just lend an ear,
And practice non-violence from year to year.
Put down the guns, throw down the knives,
Use your head, take control of your lives.

Silence,
Let’s take a minute
To talk about gun violence.

— Excerpt from poem written
  by Travis Richardson and a fellow student
  7th Grade Civics Class,
  Ponce de Leon Middle School

Jasmyn Elliott
Grade 7
Centennial Middle School