REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2006

70 Years of Making a Difference

The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment
“I want to congratulate The Melissa Institute on the occasion of its 10th anniversary. I am proud to be associated with such a dynamic organization, which has transformed the lives of so many of our South Florida residents.”

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

“Our college students are reading tutors in local elementary schools. The Melissa Institute helped tutors realize how much their work is valued. Our tutors felt immeasurable pride in their work after the Institute’s presentation.”

Gail Gelvan, America Reads Manager

“The Melissa Institute has taken on a special task of blending the face of humanity and the intelligence of science to create hope for crime victims. No matter what our legal system tries to accomplish, victims always have a nagging fear that pain and despair will be their personal legacy of crime. The Melissa Institute has worked to dispel those fears. I am proud to be associated with such endeavors.”

State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle

“In addition to sponsoring an annual conference with nationally known presenters, The Melissa Institute has also been instrumental in sponsoring violence prevention workshops in some of the district’s targeted elementary schools. We are proud of the work that your organization has accomplished.”

Deborah Montilla, Administrative Director, Student Services, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

“Your antiviolence educational efforts to protect the most vulnerable among us enhance life for our entire community. May God bless you always in your peace-building work.”

Archbishop John C. Favalora, Archbishop of Miami

“I admire deeply the spirit and energy and purposeful work of The Melissa Institute, which is so fully in the legacy of Melissa Aptman. The Institute is making a significant contribution toward Miami and America as a more peaceful, less violent place.”

David Lawrence Jr., President of The Early Childhood Initiative and former publisher of The Miami Herald

The mission of The Melissa Institute is to prevent violence through education by disseminating and applying research-based knowledge to promote safer communities.
In 1995, Melissa Aptman was preparing to graduate from college and was filled with youthful zeal at the thought of what she might accomplish. However, in May of that year, only a few weeks before graduation, her life was tragically cut short. Melissa was murdered during a carjacking in St. Louis. Thus, she was never permitted to realize her dreams and achieve her goals.

This year, as The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment commemorates its 10th anniversary, we look back upon a decade of accomplishments. The Institute, established in Melissa’s name and infused with her spirit, is dedicated to the idea that research, education and public awareness are important preludes to effective strategies for social change.

There has never been a time when it was more important to understand the nature of violence and, through that understanding, to prevent it.

In the 10 years since our inception, the Institute has:

- Invested more than $750,000 to help educators, clinicians and policymakers learn and apply violence prevention methods.
- Conducted educational workshops and conferences that have provided training to more than 5,000 professionals.
- Consulted on violence prevention to nearly 50 local agencies and organizations, including Miami-Dade Public Schools, the Mayor’s Office and the Public Defender’s Office.
- Brought Dr. Dale Willows’ Literacy Initiative to teachers of high-risk elementary students.
- Conducted programs that address bullying and childhood aggression, incorporating the work of Debra Pepler, Ph.D.
- Shared Dr. Jim Larson’s expertise in anger management and conflict resolution with more than 400 teachers, social workers and counselors.
- Created an Educators’ Website (www.teachsafeschools.org) — a valuable resource for teachers, administrators and counselors.
- Supported innovative school programs, including Second Step, a nationally recognized conflict resolution program, and COMP (Classroom Organization and Management Program), a teacher-training program to reduce student discipline problems.
- Granted literacy awards, graduate student scholarships and doctoral dissertation awards to encourage innovation and nurture the careers of new scientists in the areas of violence prevention and treatment.

Together, we have accomplished a great deal, but much more work still remains. We are committed to working to meet the challenges that await us in the future. Our 10-year history gives us inspiration, direction and a firm foundation to build on. We look ahead, knowing that the future is ours to shape.

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. The Institute was established by Melissa’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.
What 10 Years Can Do

When you look at a young child, it’s tempting to imagine what he or she will be like in 10 years. A decade can bring so many changes, especially during such formative years. In a relatively short time, worries about bicycles, homework and peer acceptance turn into car payments, career choices, personal relationships — and more peer acceptance. What kind of adult will the child become? How will those personal relationships unfold? What kind of world will that young adult help to create?

The Melissa Institute has spent a decade searching for the answers to questions like these. We provide a bridge between research on violence prevention and the practical application of the results of that research. From the start, we have worked to provide educators, clinicians and public policymakers with innovative, empirically based tools to reduce violence by addressing issues such as bullying, literacy and classroom management. Through educational initiatives, conferences, scholarships, training and consultation, we “give psychology away” in an effort to fulfill our mission of violence prevention and treatment. In fact, we’ve spent more than $750,000 since 1996 in support of a variety of vital projects.

Ten years can also make a huge difference in the life of an organization. Impulses become ideas. Ideas become strategies, which in turn become reality. The initial impulse that sparked the creation of The Melissa Institute was Melissa’s murder in 1995. In an effort to cope with the tragedy and give meaning to a life that was ended by a random act of violence, Lynn and Michael Aptman, M.D., teamed up with Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., and Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., to establish the Institute. Dr. Meichenbaum, named by American Psychologist as “one of the 10 most influential psychotherapists of the 20th century,” serves as the Institute’s Research Director. Dr. Keeley, President of The Melissa Institute, is a psychologist with extensive clinical experience in the treatment of victims and aggressors.

Bullying, Literacy and Violence Prevention

Over the years, we have attracted the best and the brightest individuals to help guide our direction and implement our initiatives. For example, we’ve worked with Debra Pepler, Ph.D., an internationally recognized expert on bullying and childhood aggression, to put the results of her research into practice.

Following the tragic events at Columbine High School in Colorado, bullying was identified by the Columbine Review Commission as a “risk factor in assessing the potential for school violence.” The effect upon the victim can be lifelong. The perpetrators may not simply “grow out of it,” so the problem too often spirals on into adulthood.

The Melissa Institute educates people about bullying as a major contributing factor in incidents of school violence. Each November, we host a Bullying Education Series. The Institute works with pediatricians, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, school counselors and administrators, students and other groups to implement strategies based on the most current research.

We are also fortunate to have collaborated
with Dale Willows, Ph.D., a member of The Melissa Institute Scientific Board and a renowned literacy expert at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The Melissa Institute’s Literacy Initiative is the result of this effort. The project’s aim is to break the cycle of violence and crime that stems from poor literacy skills by training teachers to consistently produce successful readers and writers. Students who do not learn to read by the third grade are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. This pattern will continue throughout their lives.

Dr. Willows has been working with high-risk, bilingual students for the past two years at Hialeah Elementary School in Miami. During that time, reading scores went up significantly in grades three and four. Before Dr. Willows arrived, the school’s reading scores were consistently rated well below average. Today, Hialeah Elementary School achieves higher FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) scores than the average Miami-Dade County school. As a result of the success in Hialeah, The Melissa Institute’s Literacy Initiative has expanded to include Martin Luther King Primary School. Teachers in these schools are provided with in-depth training that exceeds anything they have experienced in their careers.

**Educators’ Website**

Providing educators with the best practices for success is a large part of what we do. The Melissa Institute Educators’ Website — www.teachsafeschools.org — is a tool for administrators, teachers and counselors. The site, made possible with the generous support of the Robert and Renee Belfer Foundation and other supporters, is designed to be a work in progress. It is chock full of valuable resources and references, and is organized in a way that provides quick access to a wide array of information. A TeachSafeSchools Advisory Committee, composed of local educators, reviews and critiques its content. The Educators’ Website is an adaptable and handy toolkit, and a perfect companion to our main website, www.melissainstitute.org. Combined, the two sites currently serve approximately 3,300 visitors each month, and that number is expected to increase substantially as traffic increases on the new Educators’ Website.

The Melissa Institute has also conducted an annotated review of more than 400 violence prevention websites. This critical information points to the work of many quality organizations, and is available for download at www.melissainstitute.org.

**Educational Programs, Workshops and Conferences**

In the past 10 years, the Institute has provided training to more than 5,000 professionals through workshops and conferences. More than 7,000 students have been directly reached by our programs, and we’ve made presentations to more than 30 school faculties and community groups.

We also support educators through other programs, including Second Step, Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP), and annual presentations about student discipline, anger management and modifying aggressive behaviors.

Second Step is a nationally recognized conflict resolution program currently being implemented at Ponce de Leon Middle School and Carver Elementary School. Students learn about impulse control, problem solving and anger management. The program is especially effective because students are exposed to it over a number of years.
COMP is a research-based teacher training program designed to reduce student discipline problems and increase academic achievement. The program is being implemented at JRE Lee Opportunity School, a special Miami-Dade County Public School for at-risk students who have been assigned there because of behavioral problems.

Melissa Institute Scientific Board member Jim Larson, Ph.D., is an expert on anger management and conflict resolution. Since 2002, Dr. Larson has shared the latest research on these topics with more than 400 Miami-Dade County Public School teachers, social workers and counselors. Literature from Dr. Larson’s presentation is available on The Melissa Institute’s website.

Donna Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Research Director of The Melissa Institute, and Ann Masten, Ph.D., presented the latest research-based information about promoting resilience in young people at the 2005 conference.

Annual Conference Topics

- **2006** Aggression and Suicide Among Children and Youth: Focus on Gender Differences
- **2005** Strengthening Resilience in Children and Adults
- **2004** Family Violence: Intervention and Prevention Strategies in a Diverse Society
- **2003** Trauma, Children and Families: Practical Ways to Help
- **2002** Anger Control and Aggressive Behavior: A Life-Span Treatment Approach
- **2001** Ethnic Minorities and Diversity: Implications for Violence Prevention and Treatment
- **2000** Preventing Violence — A Life-Span Perspective
- **1999** Helping Victims of Violence
- **1998** Helping At-Risk Youth and Their Families
- **1997** Violence and Youth: Treatment and Prevention
Our educational efforts include major conferences and training sessions. The annual May conference — our largest educational forum — is attended by hundreds of teachers and principals, mental health professionals, social workers, police officers, judges, religious leaders and policymakers.

In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, The Melissa Institute sponsored a conference for professionals at Adelphi University in New York. The conference, “Trauma, Children and Their Families: Focus on the Preschool Years,” was arranged in response to a request from the New York community.

Scholarships and Awards

A part of our strategy is to nurture the careers of new scientists. We have provided graduate student scholarships — on both a national and local level — to support doctoral dissertations in the area of violence prevention and treatment of victims. Some of the dissertation subjects include: “Developmental Pathways of Aggressive Girls in Adolescence,” “Childhood Predictors of Adolescent and Young Adult Delinquency,” and “Peer Victimization and Depressive Symptoms in Adolescence.” To date, we’ve supported 18 graduate students. Their work will enrich the field of violence prevention and extend our mission into the future.

Dissertation Award Winners

2005  Michelle Harwood, University of Florida
      Erica M. Woodin, Stony Brook University
      Brian Wymbs, SUNY-Buffalo
2004  Amy Yuile, York University
      Anil Chacko, SUNY-Buffalo
      Deborah Neft, Rutgers University
2003  Joie Acosta, University of Hawai’i
      Hannah Moore, University of Miami
      Andy Williams, SUNY-Buffalo
2002  Alissa Glickman, University of Miami,
      Negar Mahmoodzadeh, University of Virginia
2001  Nicole Eldridge Marcus, University of Miami
      Katherine Herron, Indiana University
2000  Mark Bodnarchuk, University of British Columbia
1999  Janine Saunders, University of Texas at Austin
1998  Sharon Geary, Boston University
      Richard Van Dorn, Washington University

The Norma Bossard Literacy Award is named after an educator who supervised language arts and reading programs for Miami-Dade Public Schools for many years. The award includes $500 from The Melissa Institute and $500 in books provided by a publisher for the recipient’s school.

Award Winners

2005  Ana Pazos-Rego, Ph.D., University of Miami
2004  Dale M. Willows, Ph.D., University of Toronto
2003  Theresa O’Donnell, Homestead Middle School
2002  Marilyn Wolfson, Milam K-8 Center
2001  Libby Miller, Claude Pepper Elementary School
2000  Lois Magnus, Madison Middle School
Consultations

The Scientific Board of The Melissa Institute has provided nearly 50 consultations to local agencies and organizations, including Miami-Dade Public Schools (America Reads program, Domestic Violence Task Force, School Violence Prevention Task Force, Read Write Now program), the Miami-Dade Public Defender’s Office, Informed Families of Dade, Miami Coalition for a Drug-free Society, Miami-Dade County 11th Judicial Circuit Court (Juvenile Division), the Miami-Dade Mayor’s Office, Juvenile Assessment Center, Temple Beth Am School, Miami-Dade County Youth Crime Prevention Blue Ribbon Committee.

The Educator Recognition Award is given to individuals who are working within the school setting to reduce the incidence of violent behavior.

Award Winners:

2005  Helen Lieblein, LCSW, counselor at Snapper Creek Elementary School
2004  Julie Astuto, counselor at Palmetto Elementary School
2003  Beth Davis, sponsor/founder of Kids4KidsClub, Inc., teacher at Jack Gordon Elementary School and Adjunct Professor, Barry University
2002  Elvoyd Fischer, Principal, and Carol Brown, Assistant Principal, Centennial Middle School
The Community Service Award recognizes individuals whose work, dedication, contribution to the community and volunteerism are consistent with the Institute’s goals.

Award Winners:

2005  Daniella Levine, J.D., MSW, Executive Director, Human Resources Coalition of Dade County

2004  Modesto Abety, President and CEO of the Children’s Trust of Miami-Dade

2003  Walter F. Lambert, M.D., Medical Director of the Child Protection Team and Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, University of Miami

2002  Pat Morris, Chairman of Hands On Miami and Vice President of Community and Public Affairs, VISTA Healthplan

2001  Judge Tom Petersen, retired from Miami-Dade County Circuit Court, Juvenile Division

Special Angel Award

In 2004, the Institute honored philanthropist R. Kirk Landon, President of the Kirk Foundation, with the Special Angel Award. Mr. Landon was recognized for “his commitment to children, his philanthropy in support of many worthwhile human endeavors, and his unwavering support for The Melissa Institute.”

“Ten years ago, The Melissa Institute arose from tragedy to begin planting the seeds of violence prevention. The need for such work has never been greater than it is today.”
Rudolph F. Crew, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

“The Institute fills an important role in providing the community with factual information based upon valid research regarding violence prevention and treatment. I congratulate them on what has been accomplished and encourage their continued involvement in our community.”
R. Kirk Landon, philanthropist
Peace and Harmony

The Melissa Institute holds an annual fundraising concert, Peace and Harmony: Music for a Better World. The 2005 event was held in February, and featured jazz singer Nicole Henry. The concert raised more than $80,000 to benefit the Educators’ Website. In 10 years, the annual event has raised more than $400,000 for the Institute’s educational and research efforts.

Over the years, a number of individuals and groups with an interest in violence prevention have generously assisted our organization by sponsoring social events. These have provided us with fundraising and friend-raising opportunities.

Looking Ahead

In essence, the entire goal of The Melissa Institute is to look ahead. Our mission is to make a difference in the lives of young people today so that the future will be brighter for everyone. So, what do we do next?

The simple answer is, “More of the same.” More than 4,000 individuals and corporations have contributed to us so far. By relying on the most talented, far-sighted, dedicated professionals in the field of violence prevention and treatment, we’ve built a firm and lasting foundation. As we continue to grow as an organization and expand our services and our influence throughout the community, new challenges will confront us. New accomplishments will await us. If you pick up any newspaper and read the headlines, you’ll see that the work we do has never been more vital than it is now.

Of course, our future is also in the hands of our supporters. Your contributions and compassion have made it possible for us to be here today, acknowledging our 10th anniversary. Our success is your accomplishment.
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 fund-raising, plan projects and represent the organization at community events.

Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D., is President and a founder of The Melissa Institute. She is a psychologist in private practice with 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.

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

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

Yamile Barrera, President, Business Travel Advisors.

Jo Baxter, MBA, Corporate Vice President, Baptist Health South Florida.

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

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

Susan M. Kahn, MBA, retired marketing executive active in community affairs.

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

Paul A. Lester, Esq., Partner, Fieldstone, Lester, Shere and Denberg, LLP.

Elizabeth Ritter, Esq., attorney in private practice.


George “Trae” Williamson III, J.D., Vice President, Williamson Cadillac-Hummer.

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

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami. He is co-chair of the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence. He is also a member of the National Advisory Board of the National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center and research consultant to the National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. He has published extensively on ethnicity and wife assault and the clinical assessment of battering.

James Larson, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology and Director of the School Psychology Training Program at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. His recent book is *Think First: Addressing Aggressive Behavior in Secondary Schools*. 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.

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, 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 20th 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*.

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 co-director for the Canadian Initiative for the Prevention of Bullying. 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.

Wendy K. Silverman, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Director of the Child and Family Psychosocial Research Center at Florida International University. She has authored/co-edited four books, including *Helping Children Cope with Disasters and Terrorism* with Dr. Annette La Greca. Dr. Silverman is a member of the scientific advisory board for Child and Adolescent Trauma Treatment in New York and editor of the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*.

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.

Dale Willows, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology at the University of Toronto. She is also a registered psychologist in the Province of Ontario. She is an acknowledged expert in the teaching of reading and has published extensively. She also serves as a member of the National Reading Panel.

HONORARY BOARD
This board is composed of distinguished citizens and community leaders who lend their support to The Melissa Institute.

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She was honored with the Contribution to Knowledge Award from the Psychology Foundation of Canada.
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