



The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment

2007 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

The Institute at a Crossroads



In the U.S., 2.7 million violent crimes are committed at or near schools.



Eighty percent of daytime burglaries are committed by out-of-school youth.



Approximately 4 to 6 million American students are at risk for developing aggressive and antisocial behavior.



Homicide is the leading cause of death among African-American youth, and is the second-leading cause of fatalities among all adolescents.



A black teen is at least four times more likely to be killed by gunfire than a white teen.



Between 1979 and 2001, gunfire killed 90,000 children and teens in the U.S.



Nearly 8 American children or teens die every day through gun violence.

The Institute

at a Crossroads

A crossroads can be a confusing place. So many choices — which way is the right way? When choosing a new path, do you abandon the one that you've been traveling for so long?

The Melissa Institute is at a crossroads. But, far from being a place of confusion, it is an opportunity to forge a future, guided by our mission to prevent violence through the application of knowledge.

Like most organizations, the Institute has gone through growing pains. Along with more than 20 other not-for-profit organizations, we were invited to take part in a study of sustainability conducted by the Center on Non-profit Effectiveness funded by the Health Foundation of South Florida. The study concluded that most not-for-profits don't last more than 10 years because they are founder-driven rather than mission-driven. In essence, their focus on the past eventually drags them to a standstill.

Last year, the Institute marked its 10th anniversary of service to the community. At this crucial juncture, we must fix our gaze on the future, according to Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D., president of The Melissa Institute. As we focus on what we can do to change the world, we must concentrate on sustainability. We have succeeded in promoting an influx of talented, young professionals into our organization. We have also developed new avenues of funding.

The Institute's mission-driven approach to community service has been enhanced. We have developed a strategic plan and have hired a full-time project director. We will maintain our focus on literacy and will continue to shine a light on the corrosive effects of bullying. We will strive to provide and improve valuable resources such as our Educators' Website, and training programs such as ACT Against Violence (*see page 4*). We will also expand our efforts to be of service to the community through initiatives like our Silence the Violence symposium (*see page 2*).

The vision of many talented individuals has helped us change the lives of those around us. We are committed to continue our efforts and broaden our impact so that we can help make the world a better place.



Silence the Violence

A diverse and influential group of civic leaders, policy makers, clergy, law enforcement and judicial experts gathered in the auditorium at Baptist Hospital on September 22, 2006, to address a serious issue affecting the lives of everyone in our community. The topic was the proliferation of gun violence among the youth in our community — and by association, the acceptance of violence that pervades our society today.

The impetus for The Melissa Institute’s Silence the Violence symposium was the tragic death of nine-year-old Sherdavia Jenkins. Shot by a stray bullet while playing on her front porch, Sherdavia was only the latest child to be killed by gunfire in Miami-Dade County. Her death was symptomatic of the depth of the community’s youth violence epidemic whereby 25 youths had been killed between April and August, 2006. Sherdavia had been playing a game called “bury the doll” when she was fatally shot. “In their play, children tell us about their experiences and view of the world,” said Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., president of The Melissa Institute, in her opening remarks at the symposium. “When a child this

young holds a funeral for one of her dolls, something has gone tragically wrong.”

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., research director for the Institute, engaged and energized the audience with his presentation, “How to Make an Aggressive and Violent Youth: Implications for Prevention and Treatment.” Dr. Meichenbaum exhorted participants to apply evidence-based programs specific to their own areas of expertise. He stressed the importance of reading comprehension and enlightened, community-based policing in preventing youth violence.

Modesto Abety, president and CEO of the Children’s Trust, provided a sobering set of statistics, including the fact that the number of children killed by guns in 2003 exceeded the number of U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq from 2003 to 2006. “We must strive to create a new, nonviolent norm,” Mr. Abety said. “Murder is a problem for the whole community; it affects us all.”

Groups of participants from a mixture of disciplines discussed solutions and reported back to the group at large. The overriding consensus of the groups was that much could be done to prevent youth violence by changing the way schools address the issue. Suggestions included: reexamining the focus on FCAT testing, allowing educators to spend more time and resources on



Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Research Director of The Melissa Institute, energized the audience with his call to provide antiviolence interventions with youth that are proven to work.

violence prevention, bullying prevention and literacy programs; removing programs that are not successful or evidence-based to make better use of finite funds; soliciting commitment and leadership from school principals on the issue of violence prevention; and assigning full-time, on-site social workers in schools.

Keynote speaker and Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Leonard Pitts blamed the epidemic of violence on five factors: low self-esteem, poverty, family disintegration, mis-education and an existing culture of violence. "What would we say to Sherdavia Jenkins if we could talk to her now?" he asked. "I would want to tell her that her death was the catalyst for people to take action."

The entire symposium was imbued with a sense of urgency. Participants seemed dedicated to the idea that, this time, resolutions need to be put into action, and that actions must take place on many levels: personal, family, community and in society as a whole. The Melissa Institute can and will provide tools, resources and a forum for discussion. "Silence the Violence" was the Institute's clarion call to action, and it was clear that the participants left the meeting ready to answer the call.



"We must strive to create a new, nonviolent norm."

Modesto Abety

Adults and Children Together (ACT) Against Violence

What is the difference between discipline and punishment? Discipline has its roots in the word “disciple,” which, unlike punishment, connotes positive leadership. When parents learn how to effectively guide their children – and to lead by example — they go a long way toward creating nonviolent youth. This is one of the basic tenets of the ACT Against Violence program, a national antiviolence initiative developed by the American Psychological Association and embraced by The Melissa Institute.

The primary teacher of any child is his or her parent. Through the ACT program, the Institute educates professionals in how to teach parents critical thinking and communication skills that will help them establish effective relationships with their children.

Childhood violence can often be linked to a lack of problem-solving and social skills in the parent. Children learn how to deal with others through the example set by their parents and, when they become parents themselves, they pass on the attitudes and behaviors they have learned to their own children.

The Melissa Institute implements the ACT program in our community by training the trainers who then educate parents to be positive role models and create safe environments that protect children from violence.



Melissa Institute President Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., talks with social workers at the ACT Against Violence training session.

Reaching Students. Teaching Teachers.

Homestead Senior High School contacted The Melissa Institute for assistance with issues of violence that were beginning to spiral out of control. Jim Larson, Ph.D., a member of the Institute’s Scientific Board, visited the school and consulted with teachers, students and administrators. In his report to the school, Dr. Larson outlined numerous challenges and recommendations. He provided school administrators with methods that would help them increase student engagement, decrease the level of violence, and identify incoming



students who may be predisposed to violence. He also suggested that they implement programs that can defuse potentially dangerous situations before they happen. While the problem is admittedly complex, the rational, science-based suggestions contained in the report provide school officials and students with a workable model for success. “This was a school that was out of control,” said Principal Dr. Henry Crawford Jr., who noted that improvements are already evident in student attitudes. “I am here to tell you that it can be done.”

The Melissa Institute provides consultative services to numerous community agencies and organizations, including Miami-Dade Public Schools, Miami-Dade Public Defender’s Office, Informed Families of Dade, and Miami-Dade County 11th Judicial Circuit Court (Juvenile Division), as well as South Florida’s faith-based community.

We also provide training to professionals through workshops, conferences, presentations and educational programs such as Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP), a teacher-training program to reduce student discipline problems; and Second Step, a conflict resolution program in which students, over a number of years, learn impulse control and anger management. Second Step is currently in effect at Ponce de Leon Middle School and Carver Elementary School.

Preventing Bullying

In November, 2005, a 17-year-old girl shot a classmate on a school bus. When Trish Ramsay, education director at The Melissa Institute, heard of the incident, her first thought was: bullying.

The teen who did the shooting, Camille Burke, had been beaten up and ridiculed the day before by the shooting victim. Ms. Burke, who will be tried as an adult, faces the possibility of life in prison for the premeditated act of violence.

Ms. Ramsay was quoted in a *Miami Herald* article. “When children go to such lengths to use a weapon, they usually turn it on themselves or their tormentors,” she said.

There are two types of bullying: direct and indirect. Direct bullying results in physical harm when people push, shove or fight. Indirect bullying creates a situation in which children are isolated

or taunted by their peers. Boys tend toward direct bullying, while girls often use indirect methods.

The Melissa Institute raises awareness about the link between bullying and school violence, and addresses school bullying through workshops, community education programs and teacher seminars.

The Institute hosts a one-week Bullying Education Series each November, conducted by Scientific Board member Debra Pepler, Ph.D., in which we work with local police, school administrators, psychologists, students and groups. The Institute also gives presentations by request throughout the year.



“When children go to such lengths to use a weapon, they usually turn it on themselves or their tormentors.”

Trish Ramsay

Literacy Initiative

Research shows that students who do not learn to read on grade level by third grade are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. The majority of the adult prison population in the U.S. is illiterate. The Melissa Institute, recognizing the link between literacy and violence prevention, supports programs that have demonstrated success in promoting literacy.

During the past three years, Dale Willows, Ph.D., an internationally renowned expert in the teaching of reading and a Scientific Board member, has conducted a literacy program at Hialeah Elementary School. One striking result of the program has been an increase in FCAT reading scores in grades three and four of 19 percent and 18 percent, respectively. This program has now been expanded to St. Francis Xavier Elementary School in Overtown.



Students at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School celebrate their new books, presented by literacy expert and Melissa Institute Scientific Board member Dale Willows, Ph.D.

Books for Joy

The son and daughter of Silvana Casale, a Board member of The Melissa Institute, teamed up with an international service project to collect and distribute books to three schools. Nicholas and Alexa Casale, together with friends, augmented the work of the Institute's Literacy Initiative

by creating a project called "Books for Joy." Thanks to their efforts, disadvantaged students have new worlds to explore through the wonder of reading. The young volunteers rounded up 750 books for students at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School and collected another 1,000 that were donated to Ponce de Leon Middle School and a school in Kingston, Jamaica.

Educators' Website

The Melissa Institute's educators' website — www.teachsafeschools.org — is a companion to our main website, www.melissainstitute.org. It is an ongoing project that provides toolkits for teachers, counselors and administrators. Made possible through the support of the Robert and Renee Belfer Foundation and other supporters, the site bridges the gap between research findings and practices and procedures for violence prevention. The content on the educators' website is reviewed and critiqued by an advisory committee composed of local educators.

“Parents are Powerful”

“The media is extraordinarily powerful, but parents are more so, and it’s time we acted like it.” These sentiments were expressed by nationally syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts, speaking at The Melissa Institute’s 10th annual conference. The topic was “Aggression and Suicide Among Children and Youth: Focus on Gender Differences.” Several hundred teachers, psychologists, counselors and others involved in child development heard from nationally recognized experts, and learned about gender differences in the development of aggression, as well as in the incidence of

depression and suicide. The conference featured violence prevention experts and Scientific Board members Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Debra Pepler, Ph.D., and Jim Larson, Ph.D.



Melissa Institute Research Director Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., planned the standing-room-only 10th annual conference.



Featured speaker Leonard Pitts and Institute President Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D. (above), and conference attendees (top) enjoyed some light moments.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

May 4, 2007

“Trauma-focused Interventions with Children, Youth and Their Families: School, Clinic and Community Approaches.”

Peace and Harmony

“An Evening of Peace and Harmony: Music for a Better World,” featuring jazz duo Kim Provost and Bill Solley, raised \$75,000 to support The Melissa Institute’s education and research initiatives. Nearly 300 people attended the fundraising concert at Congregation Bet Shira. Board members Yamile and Sergio Barrera and Susan and Larry Kahn chaired the event, and Sharon Lombardo chaired a silent auction that

raised \$20,000. The performance included Lynn Aptman’s original songs, *In the Blink of an Eye* and *A Precious Jewel*.



Yamile Barrera (left) and Susan Kahn co-chaired the most successful fundraiser for The Melissa Institute.



Left to right, Louis and Andrew Carricarte, Melissa Institute Board member Grace Carricarte, her father, Michael Carricarte Sr., and Jennifer Carricarte enjoyed “Peace and Harmony.”

2006 Dissertation Award Winners

Annually, The Melissa Institute makes four awards of \$2,000 to help fund outstanding graduate research projects. The 2006 winners are:

Kofi-Ien Belfon, M.A.

University of Guelph
“The Effects of Chronic Community Violence on Parents and Adolescents”

Kahni Clements, M.A.

Indiana University
“Day-to-Day Correlates of Couples Conflict”

Abigail K. Mansfield, M.A.

Clark University
“Aggression and Its Connections to Trauma and Gender Norms”

Genelle K. Sawyer, M.A.

University of Nebraska
“Heterogeneous Symptom Patterns in Sexually Abused Youth in Treatment”

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, one of the founders of the Institute and Vice President.

Yamile Barrera, President, Business Travel Advisors.

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

Grace L. Carricarte, M.A., Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center.

Kathryn Hanson Carroll, M.Div., Associate in Ministry, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Silvana Spinelli Casale, M.A., CAES, school psychologist.

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, Corporate Regional Vice President, Cardinal Health.

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Philipp N. Ludwig, MBA, Treasurer of the Institute and Corporate Director of Baptist Health South Florida.

Elizabeth Ritter, Esq., attorney in private practice.

Atlee Wampler III, Esq., President, Wampler Buchanan Walker Chabrow & Banciella, P.A., former U.S. Attorney, Southern District of Florida.

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.

Ann Kelley, Ph.D., is the former Director of Program Development and Project Director of *Healing the Hurt*, a category III site of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Her nearly three decades of mental health services experience has focused on working with children who have suffered trauma by physical abuse, homelessness or natural disasters. She has labored tirelessly to prepare childcare professionals to work with children affected by trauma and provide parenting support.

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

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.

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

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