



**THE MELISSA INSTITUTE**  
*For Violence Prevention and Treatment*



2021 Report to the Community

# Resilience in Action

Dear Friends,

We are writing months after COVID-19 became the most impactful health crisis of our lifetime and a defining moment in our history. Like you, we are painfully aware of the hurt, dislocation and death that is now ubiquitous in so many lives. As you read this report, you will gain insight into why we are very proud of The Melissa Institute's extraordinary response to the crisis.



This past year, the Institute set out with an ambitious agenda. Thanks to your generous support, we were able to move forward with confidence and enthusiasm. Our successful end of 2019 continued into early 2020 and culminated with a joyful "Peace & Harmony" celebration on March 7. Immediately thereafter, COVID-19 arrived, forcing us to cancel all of our in-person educational and training activities.

We found innovative ways to increase our social media presence and to promote health and safety. Over the past eight months, the Institute's educational and violence prevention efforts have been active and impactful. We improved resources on our website and greatly expanded our YouTube channel. As a result, we produced programs to bolster resilience, support parents and caregivers, and address the challenges and impact of violence prevention during the pandemic and beyond.

Thanks to collaborations with experts on our Scientific Board and other scholars, The Melissa Institute reached thousands of people across the nation and the world. We've done this through webinars, online educational trainings, printed materials and blogs. We invite you to use our extensive and comprehensive COVID-19 resources (<https://melissainstitute.org/covid-19/>) and to share them with those in your personal and professional networks.

Recent analyses on the impact of COVID-19 on nonprofit organizations like ours predict significant decreases in donations, along with increases in expenses resulting in a large number of closures. However, with reports of surging rates of domestic violence, suicides, homicides, gun sales, cyberbullying, unemployment and drug addiction during the pandemic, The Melissa Institute's work is more important than ever.

We need your financial support now to guarantee that the Institute will continue to be a vital resource for you, your loved ones, your community and our society during this stressful pandemic and into the future. Please give as generously as you can to help us continue our mission.

We wish you and your family peace and health during this difficult time.

Be safe and well!

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Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

# Transforming and Expanding our Educational Efforts

By Elise Suna, LMFT, Education Director



The Melissa Institute has continued to meet the violence prevention educational needs of our community, despite this past year being one of significant hardship due to the pandemic and financial strains. While preparing the Institute for a momentous 2021, we will continue to rise to the occasion. Next year, The Melissa Institute will celebrate 25 years of bringing

evidence-based programs and expert violence prevention trainers to South Florida. Our efforts already have an impact well beyond our region, and next year we will expand our online training and educational initiatives to reach a broader national and international audience.

This past winter, before COVID-19 forced us to shift to online learning platforms, we were fortunate to be able to conduct several in-person training programs. We presented Trauma-Informed Care to the Group Violence Intervention Initiative, parenting at St. Thomas Elementary, and bullying prevention with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS).

We presented at the Synergy Virtual Conference alongside the M-DCPS Student Services department to teachers and administrators from schools throughout Miami-Dade. We have had the pleasure of partnering with Student Services on a variety of initiatives over the past 25 years, and we're grateful to be working with the department again to address and prevent bullying.

We awarded three Belfer-Aptman Scholars Awards to support the dissertation work of students. Their research

projects will help further the field of violence prevention research in areas such as intimate partner violence, racial discrimination and ethnic-racial trauma. The recipients were:

Jiepin Cao, Duke University - "Understanding Intimate Partner Violence Among Chinese Women via the Lens of Social Determinants of Health and Intersectionality"

Ashley Maxie-Morland ("Maxie"), University of Miami - "It Depends: Effects of Context on Ethnic-Racial Identity's Protective Role for Black and Latina/o Emerging Adults"

Susanna Park, Oregon State University - "How Native American Women Seek Support as Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence"

Although the pandemic forced us to postpone our Annual Conference on Bystander Intervention in May featuring Dr. Ervin Staub, we held it as an online event in June. Nearly 100 people attended the live presentation, which we followed with a private Q&A session with Dr. Staub. Both the conference and the Q&A are available on YouTube, and continue to be viewed by people learning how to be an active bystander to prevent violence in our communities.

After the success of our first online training course, Scientific Board member Dr. Debra Pepler stepped in to lead our next training, on the benefits and challenges of social media on youth. The recordings from her training and subsequent Q&A sessions are also now available on YouTube.

As we move forward, we are debuting a monthly training schedule over Zoom on various topics related to violence prevention, such as bullying prevention, trauma-informed care, bystander intervention strategies and domestic violence intervention and prevention. We are excited to share this calendar with you soon!

## 24th Annual Conference



While we did not hold our Annual Conference in-person at the University of Miami as planned, we were able to successfully shift over to a virtual format on June 19.

The conference, featuring Dr. Ervin Staub on the topic of Bystander intervention, was reconceptualized to fit the pressing needs for reconciliation and healing brought forth by the pandemic and growing concerns about police use of force and racial injustice across the nation. Dr. Staub answered the questions: "What leads to hostility and violence against other people, especially by groups against other groups?" and "How can we prevent violence and promote peaceful relations between groups and individuals?"

Nearly 100 people were in attendance and another 200 hundred have since watched the conference through our YouTube channel to learn about how to be an active bystander to prevent violence in our communities.

Stay tuned for our plans for our 25th Annual Conference in 2021!

# The Importance of the F-Word (Flexible) in Times of Crisis.

By Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Research Director



Joseph Campbell reminds us that living by the “F-word” – Flexible – is crucial to overcoming adversity. Moreover, he says that “Psychological flexibility involves being clear about one’s values and mindful of one’s thoughts and feelings and acting in accord with your values.” A close look at The Melissa Institute’s impressive response to the COVID-19 pandemic

shows an admirable capacity to be flexible and mission-driven during one of the most disruptive and harmful moments in our lifetime.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute has produced a valuable collection of articles, webinars and handouts to promote the well-being and safety of our communities. As part of this effort, I gave free access to my handbook, *Roadmap to Resilience: A Toolkit for Returning Service Members and Their Family Members*, which has resulted in over 19,000 visitors from 112 countries. Through [roadmaptoresilience.wordpress.com](http://roadmaptoresilience.wordpress.com), readers will find articles on how resilience training can change the structure and function of the brain and ways that humor can give your brain a shot of dopamine.

Roadmap to Resilience highlights the following 12 steps to becoming psychologically flexible and adapt to and overcome adversity:

1. Recognize and adapt to various fluctuating situational demands. Avoid “change blindness.”
2. Change mindsets and perspectives and accompanying behavioral repertoires, when needed.
3. Be aware of thoughts and feelings in the present.

4. Shift intentional focus from the past or the future to the present.
5. Find alternative routes toward desired goals. Engage in “pathways” thinking.
6. Organize and prioritize strategies and actions that fit the situation.
7. Be open to and accepting of emotional experiences and tolerate distress and frustration.
8. Be willing to engage in difficult situations and undertake challenging tasks that have uncertainty and risks.
9. Persist and show grit and determination.
10. View failures as “learning opportunities” and not as end-points. Diagnose failures so you can see potential obstacles and setbacks coming on and can head them off. Troubleshoot situations. Welcome a healthy relationship with failure. Conduct after-action debriefings.
11. Maintain a balance among important life domains.
12. Organize a life built around meaningful beliefs and values.

I urge you to practice flexibility during this time and build up your resilience toolbox with the Institute’s articles and tools designed to help with home schooling and virtual learning, safety issues with children as they prepare to go back to school, ways to handle parental stress (which appears in both English and Spanish), helping people cope with feelings of prolonged and complicated grief and bereavement, and promoting peace and harmony at home.

I also urge you, if your situation allows it, to generously support the Institute’s efforts to protect our health and safety through the pandemic and beyond.



Elise Suna, LMFT, Education Director, presenting Trauma-Informed Care to the Group Violence Initiative.

## Board Honors

The Melissa Institute’s work is guided by the wisdom and spirit of an outstanding group of board members, advisors, and supporters. Among these we wish to highlight three who have recently received the highest accolades in their fields of endeavor: Scientific Board Member Marleen Wong for her selection as a member of the 2020 induction class of The California Social Work Hall of Distinction sponsored the California Social Welfare Archives; Scientific Board Member Daniel Santisteban for his selection as the 2020 Distinguished Career Contributions to Research Award by The Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race of the American Psychological Association; and, Honorary Board Member David Lawrence for his selection as the 2021 Sand In My Shoes Award from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. We are enormously proud of our board members and advisors and of the great honor they bring to our community and to The Melissa Institute.

# Intellectual Humility and Leadership During the Pandemic

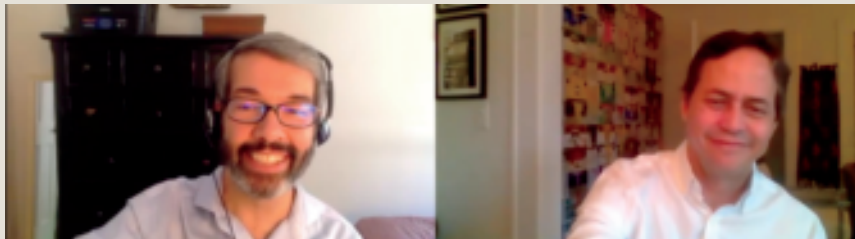
Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., Executive Director

“I think it would be a tragedy if we come out of this pandemic and things go back to the way that they were before. Right? In every aspect of our lives. This is an enormous opportunity. One of the questions that I ask, specifically from practitioners is, ‘What would you like to keep from what you’re doing right now as you move along?’ and, ‘What do you want to let go of from the old reality?’ For me this is an extraordinary opportunity.”

Juan Carlos Arean’s statement, made during one of the Institute’s webcasts, echoes through each recorded session we have produced during the pandemic. Our interlocutors have shared innovative ways to serve both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, more efficient ways to respond to crime, how to respond to the needs of the community while preventing gun violence, and what it takes to foster reconciliation and healing in this difficult time. Together, they challenge us to stop relying on what

is comfortable and familiar as we move forward. Above all, they remind us that intellectual humility makes us better leaders in times of crisis.

To be humble, this way does not mean giving up on what we know and trust. It means acknowledging to ourselves and others that we don’t have all the answers, that we must be open to learning from others, be open to adjusting how we look at the data and ultimately be comfortable with being wrong. As the renowned family therapist Salvador Minuchin said, “We live our lives like chips in a kaleidoscope, always part of patterns that are larger than ourselves and somehow more than the sum of their parts... When we look at human beings from this perspective, whole new possibilities open up to exploring behavior and alleviating pain.” Imagine the new realities we can create if we choose to lead this way.



*Juan Carlos Areán and Dr. Etiony Aldarondo discuss the other side of domestic violence. Watch the full presentation on our YouTube channel.*

## 2020 Suzanne L. Keeley Community Service Award



This year’s recipient of the Suzanne L. Keeley Community Service Award is Wayne Rawlins, project manager for Miami-Dade County’s

Anti-Violence Initiative. The award recognizes Mr. Rawlins’ outstanding leadership in preventing gun violence and assisting victims in the county. The Anti-Violence Initiative includes the Group Violence Intervention and Walking One Stop programs – nationally acclaimed programs changing the paradigm on how to deter gun violence and deliver trauma-informed services in Miami-Dade’s most challenged neighborhoods. To learn more about Mr. Rawlins’ work, see his interview with Dr. Etiony Aldarondo on our YouTube Channel.



## SOS Donation 2020

The Melissa Institute received a \$3,000 donation from Students Offering Support (SOS) to support our bullying prevention services. The money was raised through the annual Bowling Against Bullying event in March, and other fundraising activities. We are thankful for their generous support.

# Tools for Resilience: The 6 C's for Peace & Harmony

By Elise Suna, LMFT, Education Director

After more than eight months of social distancing, we are all struggling in some way. Whether we are our child's homeroom, science, social studies, math or reading teacher in addition to our regular duties; whether we are an essential employee and still have to find ways to take care of our health and the health of our families while also doing our jobs; whether we have been sick or have lost someone in this; whether we have made the transition to virtual work but still greatly miss our friends and family and our routines, we are all impacted.

Resilience is not about maintaining positivity, it is about seeing our strength to overcome despite significant hardships and tragedy. It is about acknowledging, and not pushing aside our realities. It allows us an opportunity to access our capacities to achieve some sense of inner peace and harmony again despite adversity. It is about acceptance and curiosity rather than judgment. It is about our ability to bounce back. We are enduring. This can be exhausting and terrifying, but it can also be transformative.

To help you cultivate resilience in your life during this difficult time, we offer you a simple set of tools we call the 6 C's for Peace & Harmony:

- **Caring**

Caring for yourself throughout this is crucial. This includes doing what you can while acknowledging you are not operating at your optimal level. Practice good sleep and hygiene, but also accept that you just might not be getting the sleep you once did. Try to eat healthy and exercise, but allow yourself cheat moments.

- **Compassion**

Be forgiving of yourself and others. Try to avoid placing judgment. Maybe you are not getting as much done as you once did. That is okay. More time does not mean more productivity. This is unprecedented and there are no rules on how to cope and get through this. Additionally, you cannot control other people's productivity or reaction. They are doing the best they can, just like you. We all need extra forgiveness these days.

- **Connectedness**

The ability to connect with others is vitally important. This is why many have replaced the idea of "social distancing" with "physically distancing." Shared experience is healing and helps us get through. Connect through Zoom, Facebook groups, or sing on your balcony. Anything that makes you comfortable while staying connected.

- **Community**

Keep in mind that by wearing masks, you are contributing to the collective good, and that is enough right now. But if you're looking for more, consider giving support by asking a neighbor if they're short on any supplies. Or write an uplifting chalk message for your neighbors to find on their walks. If you're in the position to do so, consider giving blood or donating to organizations in need.

- **Communication**

Clear and relevant communication is crucial during this, and helps mitigate the effects of the trauma. Tune in to trusted news sources (in moderation). It is important to have all the facts so we can be empowered to make the right decisions for ourselves. Also, find appropriate outlets or sources of humor. A good belly laugh can be cathartic.

- **Competence**

Take credit for any accomplishments or wins. Maybe you started a project you had been wanting to tackle, or maybe you finished a blog post you had been wanting to write for a week.

In her address in early April, Queen Elizabeth gave a powerful message to us all, "We will succeed and that success will belong to every one of us. We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again." This is resilience.





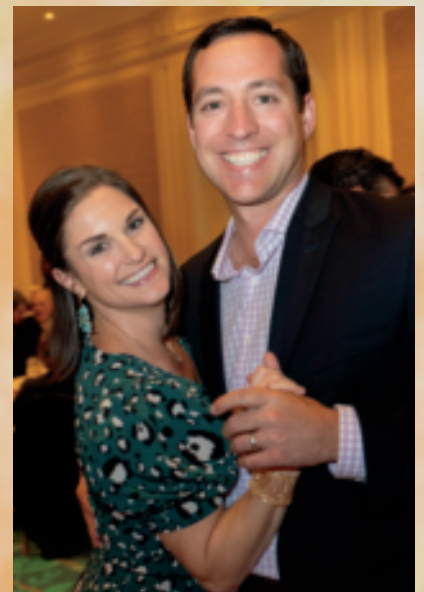
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Attendees dancing with the band, Private Stock



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## Peace & Harmony

The Melissa Institute was fortunate to host its annual Peace & Harmony event March 7 at The Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove, just before we all began to quarantine. Guests enjoyed a wonderful evening full of music and dancing, along with a silent auction of over 100 items.

Thank you to all of our volunteers, donors and supporters!

Mark your calendars for next year's Peace & Harmony, March 6, 2021!

**The Melissa Institute is fortunate to have so many businesses support us this year. This continues to be a difficult time for many small and large business owners and their employees. We encourage you to patronize the establishments that have supported us.**

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*Melissa Aptman*

On May 5, 1995, Melissa Aptman was murdered in St. Louis. A Miami native, she was just two weeks away from graduating with her bachelor's degree from Washington University. One year after her death, Melissa's family, friends and violence prevention experts established The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment to honor her memory and make a difference by working to prevent violence and assist victims.

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The Melissa Institute is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the study and prevention of violence through education, community service, research support and consultation. Our mission is to prevent violence and promote safer communities through education and application of research-based knowledge.

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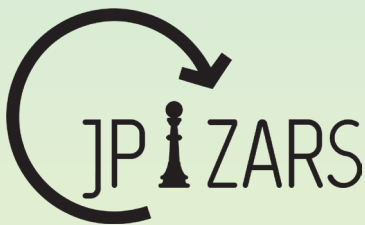
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