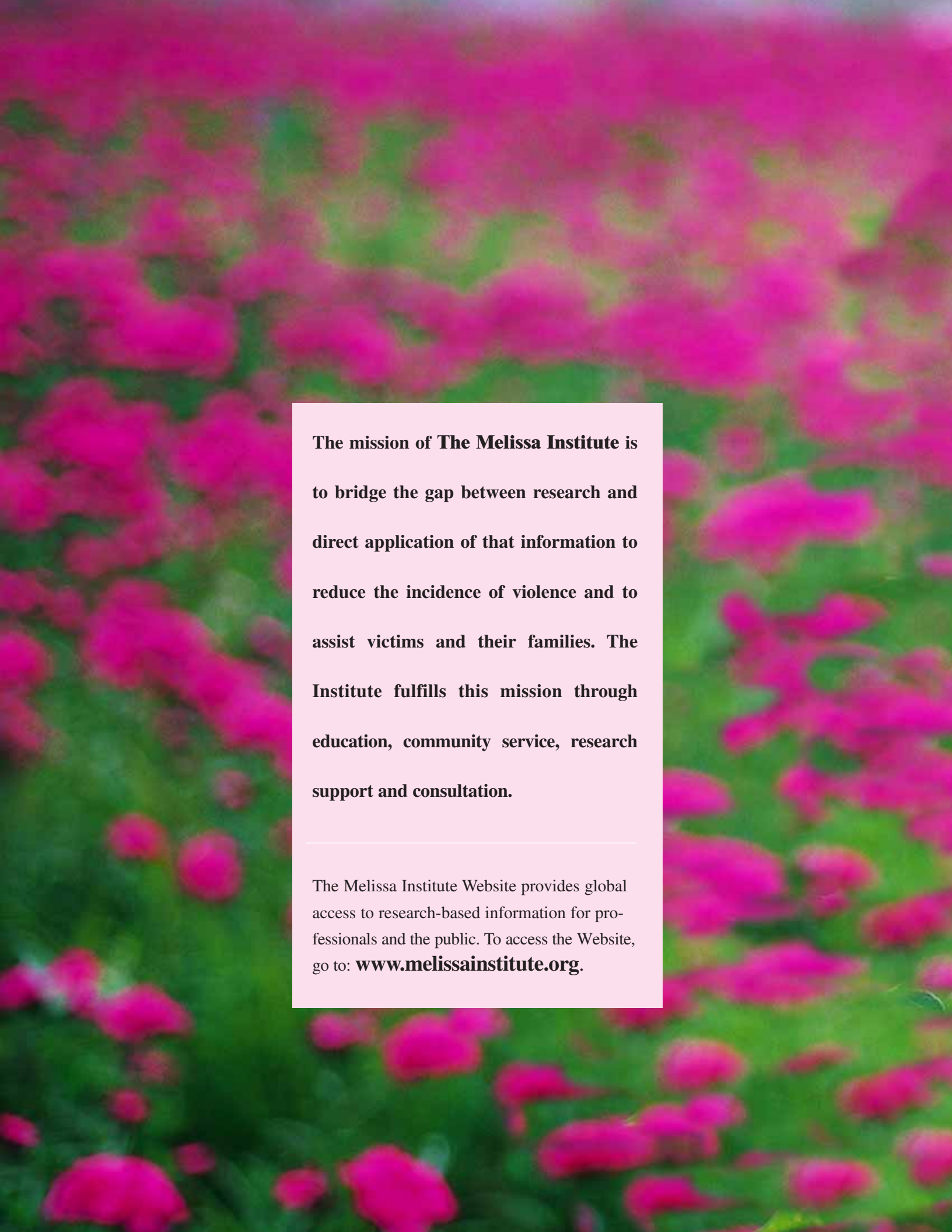


The Melissa Institute  
For Violence Prevention and Treatment

**REPORT TO THE  
COMMUNITY 2005**





**The mission of The Melissa Institute is to bridge the gap between research and 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.**

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The Melissa Institute Website provides global access to research-based information for professionals and the public. To access the Website, go to: **[www.melissainstitute.org](http://www.melissainstitute.org)**.

## Report to the Community 2005

**L**ife is complex. We all experience good days...and some that are not so good. Each new day presents an opportunity for personal growth. We learn — often through our own hardships or those of people who touch our lives — that kindness rewards everyone, and violence serves no one.



**Melissa Aptman**

In May 1995, Melissa Aptman’s young, promising life was cut short. Melissa was murdered during a carjacking in St. Louis only a few weeks before her college graduation. She knew about the power of each individual to help “repair the world,” and her legacy continues to remind us through the example she set and the tragedy she suffered.

The single, random act that took her life seems incomprehensible. Through it, we are shown the need to try to understand the nature of such things, and we strive to find meaning within the meaninglessness of violence. In this way, we may learn to prevent such tragedies in the future.

It is this dedication to the study and prevention of violence that is the heart and soul of The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment, a non-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.

## Literacy and Violence Prevention: Creating a Cycle of Success

Luis is a child who cannot read or write English. His family came to Miami from Guatemala a few years ago, and he has attended school here since halfway through kindergarten. He's a bright, friendly little boy. The school he attends is brimming with newly arrived youngsters who, like Luis, lack basic literacy skills. The faculty is overwhelmed by the challenge of bringing these children up to grade level.

Luis has been retained — held back — twice because of poor reading and writing skills. At age 10, he is still in the third grade. His literacy problems have seeped into other areas of study, and the emotional effect has taken a heavy toll on his self-esteem. He feels powerless, frustrated and angry. His friends are students who feel the same way.

Luis is representative of the vast majority of youths who turn to a life of crime and violence. He is older and bigger than most of his classmates, and he compensates for his feeling of powerlessness by bullying them. In a few years, he may drop out of school, join a gang or commit petty crimes. He is not employable, so he may begin to feel that crime and violence are his only answer. It is unlikely that his children will grow up in a home where they are surrounded by books, newspapers or a love of learning — a situation that tends to perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Could this pernicious cycle have been

stemmed at its source?

The Melissa Institute asked this question, and Dale Willows, Ph.D., renowned literacy expert at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, answered with an emphatic “Yes!”

Through The Melissa Institute, utilizing a grant funded by Larkin Hospital, Dr. Willows has undertaken a three-year literacy project. It is based in a Hialeah elementary school with a large population of at-risk students in kindergarten through third grade, many of whom have little or no English language skills.

The short-term goal of The Melissa Institute Early Literacy Project is to raise literacy levels of students. It aims to do this by training teachers how to consistently produce successful readers and writers. The long-term goal: to create in Hialeah a model for other schools serving similar student populations. That may seem a daunting challenge, but Dr. Willows believes that the first and most important task is to convince the teachers that the goal is attainable.

“Traditionally, teachers have felt that the reason disadvantaged children often do not learn literacy skills is attributable to factors that are beyond their control, such as poor funding or scant resources,” Dr. Willows said. “Through my years of research, I’ve discovered that, no matter how high these obstacles might seem, if we taught better, the vast majority of children could learn to read and write.

“Just within one school, the effect of this approach to literacy is enormous,” Dr. Willows said. “The teachers’ confidence grows and is transmitted to the students. The students, in turn, become enthusiastic learners. Their positive energy accumulates within the class and is carried with them as they graduate from one grade level to the next. Over time, we expect there to be far fewer children retained due to poor literacy skills.”

“Reading comprehension by grade three is one of the best predictors of who will finish high school,” said Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., research director for The Melissa Institute. “Children with low reading achievement in early grades have a greater likelihood of school





Members of the leadership team for the Literacy Initiative at Hialeah Elementary School include Joyce Galgano, Ph.D., Supervisor of the Division of Language Arts/Reading; Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D.; Dale Willows, Ph.D.; Jack Michel, M.D.; Carolina Naveiras, Principal, Hialeah Elementary School; and Lynn Aptman.

*“Just within one school, the effect of this approach to literacy is enormous.”* Dale M. Willows, Ph.D.

retention, dropout, drug abuse, early pregnancy, delinquency and unemployment.”

The basis of Dr. Willows’ approach is her innovative “Balanced and Flexible Literacy Diet.” Modeled on the familiar food pyramid, the Literacy Diet provides recommended literacy “food groups.” The pyramid model helps educators implement effective, flexible reading and writing instruction at all grade levels.

“Dr. Willows is committed to making a difference,” said Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., president of The Melissa Institute. “Her enthusiasm is contagious. She provides a depth of expertise that translates into success for children. And she provides training to which most teachers have not been exposed.”

In its first year, the Early Literacy Project was an unqualified success. Participating teachers have submitted glowing evaluations.

“The most powerful initial change was the change in teachers’ attitudes,” Dr. Willows said. “They became very enthusiastic, and now they can’t wait to get started again in the next term. And you can’t help but see the tremendous impact this has on the children. They’re experiencing success.”

For The Melissa Institute, this also translates into another kind of success. It is a critical step in breaking the cycle of violence.



Dale Willows, Ph.D. (left), confers with Hialeah Elementary School teachers.

#### **FACTS ABOUT LITERACY**

- Nearly 13 percent of 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate. This rate jumps to 40 percent among minority youth.
- About 10 million children in the U.S. have difficulties learning to read, and 10-15 percent of these children eventually drop out of high school.
- Among youths who get into trouble with the law involving courts, 85 percent show evidence of reading difficulties.
- Poor readers are likely to be incarcerated for crimes of greater violence than better readers.
- About 75 percent of America’s unemployed adults have difficulty reading or writing.

## Institute Addresses Family Violence Issues

What happens when violence occurs among family members? What can be done to screen, identify and prevent family violence? How can communities and clinicians respond in an ethically and culturally sensitive manner to prevent such violence and to provide effective interventions? How can culturally sensitive intervention programs for victims and batterers be developed? Finally, how should the epidemic of family violence be addressed?

These were some of the issues explored at The Melissa Institute's Eighth Annual Conference, held on May 7, 2004. More than 300 psychologists, social workers, school counselors, law enforcement professionals and



More than 300 attended the annual conference.



Michael Aptman, M.D. (left), chats with Gail Wyatt, Ph.D., and Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., who spoke at The Melissa Institute conference.

directors of social service agencies attended and learned from a distinguished faculty under the direction of Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Institute Research Director.

In addition to Dr. Meichenbaum, faculty presenters included Gail Wyatt, Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA and editor of *The Journal of Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*; Fernando Mederos, Ed.D., co-author with Etiony Aldarondo of *Programs for Men Who Batter: Intervention and Prevention Strategies in a Diverse Society* and a national expert in developing community-based responses to domestic violence; and Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami and co-chair of the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence.

Handouts prepared by the faculty may be downloaded at the Institute's website, [www.melissainstitute.org](http://www.melissainstitute.org). The Melissa Institute also acknowledges the efforts of the Women's Fund of Miami in providing conference scholarships to staff members of more than 25 social service agencies.



Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

### FACTS ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

- Annually, more than 1.6 million women are assaulted by their partners.
- More than 900,000 children are maltreated as a result of family violence.
- Both partner and child physical abuse take place in about 6% of all U.S. households.
- Children of battered women have higher rates of behavior problems than do those raised in nonviolent families.
- At least 28% of couples in the U.S. experience violence in the course of their marriage.
- Spousal abuse is rarely a one-time occurrence.
- Child maltreatment in physically abusive families exceeds 40%.



## Four Individuals Honored

Each year, The Melissa Institute presents awards honoring individuals whose work has helped us to further our mission. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of these very special individuals:

### COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

**Modesto E. Abety**, Executive Director, The Children’s Trust, has made exceptional contributions to the community, consistent with the Institute’s goal of reducing violence and helping victims and their families.



Modesto E. Abety

### EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

**Julie Astuto, M.Ed.**, Counselor, Palmetto Elementary School, has shown outstanding leadership, creativity and dedication that creates a compassionate learning environment and empowers students to embrace violence prevention.



Julie Astuto, M.Ed.

### NORMA BOSSARD AWARD

**Dale M. Willows, Ph.D.**, Professor in the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and leader of the Institute’s Literacy Initiative at Hialeah Elementary School, has exhibited a tireless commitment to the welfare of children. Her innovative approach to literacy supports the motto, “A book in every child’s hands.”



Dale M. Willows, Ph.D.

### SPECIAL AWARD

**R. Kirk Landon** has provided the Institute with wise counsel and unwavering philanthropic support since its inception in 1996. His commitment to the well-being of others exemplifies our highest aspirations.



R. Kirk Landon

The awards were presented at the Institute’s annual Recognition Luncheon in October, at the Radisson Kendall Hotel and Suites. The keynote speaker, David Lawrence Jr., is chair of the Children’s Trust and president of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. Mr. Lawrence is the former publisher of *The Miami Herald*.

### WEBSITE TO AID TEACHERS

The early 2005 launch of a website for educators begins an exciting new venture for The Melissa Institute. The website will provide concrete tools and information to help principals and teachers create an atmosphere of safety and a climate of respect for all members of the school community. Information on this website, [www.schoolviolenceprevention.org](http://www.schoolviolenceprevention.org), will be written by international experts and linked to the existing Melissa Institute website, [www.melissainstitute.org](http://www.melissainstitute.org).

The school violence prevention website is based upon a three-tiered model for school prevention and intervention programs. The first level gives educators access to information on violence prevention education for students. The second tier details interventions for students who demonstrate warning signs. Finally, it contains intensive targeted actions to be taken for students with chronic behavior problems.

The project is supported by a grant from the Robert and Renee Belfer Family Foundation, with matching funds from Miami donors. Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Research Director of The Melissa Institute, will oversee content for the website.

## Current Initiatives Focus on Bullying, Managing Conflict

The Melissa Institute continually commits its resources toward violence prevention in schools. This entails programs, presentations and consultations that are geared toward teachers, counselors, school psychologists and administrators, as well as several thousand students each year. Our primary goal is to present the most current information about bullying and conflict resolution under the direction of our Scientific Board members.

### Second Step

At Ponce de Leon Middle School, the third level of the nationally recognized "Second Step" conflict resolution program is being implemented. In addition, the Institute has expanded this research-based curriculum to an elementary school that feeds into Ponce Middle School. Carver Elementary School students in kindergarten through fifth grade are learning about empathy, impulse control, problem solving and anger management through videos, posters, scripted lessons and activity sheets. This longitudinal approach strengthens the educational benefits of the program.

### Bullying Education Series and Youth Conference

Bullying is a major contributing factor in incidents of school violence. Scientific Board member Debra J. Pepler, Ph.D., an internationally recognized expert on bullying and childhood aggression, helps raise awareness about the link



Bullying expert Debra Pepler, Ph.D., talks with police officers after her presentation on "Bullying and Violence Prevention: Challenges and Strategies."

between bullying and school violence. During a weeklong series of presentations, Dr. Pepler spoke to high school students about the prevalence of sexual harassment and date violence. She provided the latest research results that relate to community violence and raised the awareness of professionals including law enforcement officers and TRUST counselors. She discussed life-span consequences of bullying and childhood aggression that lead to workplace harassment, gang violence and other antisocial behavior. When Dr. Pepler addressed audiences of health professionals and physicians at a pediatric multispecialty review, she discussed



Ben Gold (left), points out bully "hot spots" at Palmetto Elementary School to his classmates and counselor. Ninety students from nine South Miami-Dade elementary schools participated in The Melissa Institute's bullying conference, where they pulled out maps of their schools and identified where bullying was likely to occur.



how patterns of bullying behavior can lead to child abuse, marital abuse and elder abuse.

Studies show that physical and emotional bullying behaviors peak during the middle school years. Appropriately, Dr. Pepler facilitated The Melissa Institute's Third Annual Youth Conference at Centennial Middle School for the ten schools in Miami-Dade County Public Schools' ACCESS Center VI.

These days, children mature faster and are exposed to vivid images of aggression on television, in movies, video games and on computer sites. It is not surprising that bullying is increasing in elementary schools. To help illuminate the problem, Dr. Pepler conducted an interactive forum with elementary students and counselors. The students worked to identify types of bullying in girls and boys, formulated personal plans for intervention behaviors, identified "hot spots" at their own schools where bullying occurs, participated in a question-and-answer period with the experts, and proposed strategies to improve their schools' environment. School counselors and 90 fourth- and fifth-grade students from elementary schools in the Palmetto Senior High Feeder Pattern worked with student mediators from Killian Senior High to develop action plans for their schools. As a follow-up to the Youth Conferences, a committee of elementary school counselors, safe school facilitators and Institute personnel are meeting to identify resource materials about bullying and intervention strategies. The Institute also gave school presentations by request throughout the year.

## **Classroom Organization and Management Program**

The Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP) is a research-based teacher-training program designed to reduce student discipline problems and increase academic achievement. COMP was developed at Vanderbilt University and implemented at JRE Lee Opportunity School. This is a special Miami-Dade County Public School for at-risk students who have been assigned there from their neighborhood schools due to behavioral problems.

## **Management of Anger and Aggression**

Student discipline and behavioral problems can become overwhelming challenges for teachers and counselors. Scientific Board member James D. Larson, Ph.D., is an expert on issues of anger management and aggressive behavior in young people. Through district meetings involving more than 200 Miami Dade County Public School social workers and TRUST counselors, Dr. Larson shared the latest research information for cognitive-behavioral approaches in school settings. His input was particularly relevant and well-received, attesting to years of experience as a school psychologist and university professor. In addition, Dr. Larson consulted with faculty team leaders, student services personnel and administrators about violence prevention programs at their middle schools.



**James D. Larson, Ph.D., provided teachers with insight on handling aggressive behavior.**

## **Community Service**

The Melissa Institute is an invited member of the City of Miami Police Department's Youth and Elderly Against Crime Task Force. Members include police officers, school district representatives, Safe School facilitators, PTA and community leaders, and senior citizen mentors. A master plan to reduce bullying in schools and the community was created by 300 students from Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The intergenerational forum, composed of community members of all generations, developed the Stop the Bullying Community Task Force, which is working in conjunction with community members and agencies having an interest in reducing the incidence of violence.

## Social Events Raise Funds

Members of the Aptman family attended “An Evening with Friends” on October 16, 2003 in New York City. The special event was organized by Melissa’s friend, Julie Koplun Schanzer, with support from many of Melissa’s other friends and Washington University alumni. The evening featured a raffle with prizes including two tickets to a New York Giants football game and a Barney’s gift certificate. Melissa’s mother, Lynn Aptman, detailed the ongoing work of The Melissa Institute, and expressed her gratitude to the young professionals in attendance for their commitment in supporting the Institute. Everyone attending the event could take comfort in knowing that their efforts help Melissa’s memory live on in a truly meaningful way.

The beauty of a full autumn moon over Miami was the backdrop for “Melissa’s Autumn Evening,” November 8, 2003. This unique and intimate event was held at the home of Silvana



Friends of the Institute celebrate with Honorary Board member and hostess Silvana Spinelli Casale, second from right, at the fall fundraiser and silent auction that raised over \$5,000.

and Jeff Casale. The gracious hosts gathered an international group of supporters, who enjoyed a buffet dinner and music by the Latin singing sensation Nicole. Adding to the excitement, guests participated in a silent auction to benefit The Melissa Institute. In addition, presentations were made by board members who discussed the Institute’s mission and projects. It was an enjoyable, informative and magical evening, which The Melissa Institute hopes to repeat at other homes in the future.

## 300 Attend Concert

“An Evening of Peace & Harmony: Music for a Better World,” featuring jazz saxophonist Ed Calle, raised more than \$50,000 to support the education and research efforts of The Melissa Institute. The February event was attended by about 300 people who met a \$10,000 challenge grant from the Robert and Renee Belfer Family



From left: Judge Norman Gerstein, Penn Chabrow, Remi Kajogbola, Melissa Institute President Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., and Atlee Wampler, members of the Institute’s Board of Directors, enjoyed an evening of Peace & Harmony.

Foundation in support of Institute programs.

The annual dinner concert was chaired by Adriana Ayala and Martha and Carlos de Cespedes. Eighteen florists provided complimentary centerpieces featuring the Institute’s sunflower for the dinner preceding the concert. Karen Cohen, owner of Always Flowers, took the top award for creativity.



Saxophonist Ed Calle.



From left: Martha and Carlos de Cespedes and Adriana Ayala served as co-chairs for the annual Peace & Harmony event.

## 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 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.

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

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

**Judge Norman Gerstein**, Circuit Court judge, 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 Lester, Esq.**, Partner, Fieldstone, Lester, Shere and Denberg, LLP.

**Elizabeth Ritter, Esq.**, attorney in private practice.

**Philip Scutieri**, President, Kendale Capital.

**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.

**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*.

**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.

**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 has also served 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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