

The Melissa Institute Speech
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Baptist Hospital

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Don Meichenbaum is such a hard act to follow. He has done a wonderful job laying out for us best practices for the prevention and treatment of youth violence. Please, let us give him another round of applause. Thank you Don, and thank you Melissa Institute, for bringing us together today to discuss this important topic. After listening to Don's speech I must tell you that I have had to significantly reduce my comments as he has covered it all. And, so I must say to you what Liz Taylor said to each of her husbands before she married them: "I won't keep you long"...

On to something much more serious.

In this last year, we; here in Miami Dade County---- have lost 25 children, to gunfire!

The latest data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention informs us that 2,827 children and teens died from gunfire in the United States in 2003----that is one child or teen about every three hours, nearly eight every day , 54 children and teens every week.

Four to five times as many children and teens suffered non-fatal bullet wounds during that year.

The number of children and teens killed by gun violence in 2003 alone exceeds the number of American fighting men and women killed in hostile action in Iraq from 2003 to April of 2006.

In 2003, 56 preschoolers were killed by firearms. In the same year, 52 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty.

More 10 to 19 year olds die from gunshot wounds than from any other cause in the United States other than motor vehicle accidents.

Almost 90 percent of the children and teen killed by firearms in 2003 were boys.

Black children and teens are more likely to be victims of firearm homicide. In fact, the firearm death rate for Black males ages 15 to 19 is more than four times that of White males the same age.

Enough of the numbers(*), for these too can be numbing.

It is evidently still true, what H. Rap Brown said so many years ago, that “violence is as American as Cherry Pie”. We must ask ourselves, if in fact we are not a nation that cares more deeply about the protection of our guns, than we care about the protection of our children?

What you might ask does it take for a kid in Miami-Dade County to buy a \$50 handgun? It takes about \$50 bucks, and an underground market, and weak gun restrictions, and a lack of support for gun control.

Ladies and gentlemen this is a national problem. And, as we have seen in Michael Moore’s brilliant movie Bowling for Columbine, it is not a problem for our neighbors to the north where our good friend Dr. Meichenbaum lives, in Canada.

Much of the American response to this epidemic has been local. Here in Miami-Dade County the organization that I am privileged to serve and which was created by you the voters in 2002, The Children’s Trust; has invested over \$85 million in just the types of programs that Dr. Don has recommended here today: high quality after-school programs with a strong emphasis on: literacy, school success, and social skills are serving over 40,000 children in close to 300 sites all over our county. We have launched school health teams comprised of a school nurse, a social worker or behavioral health specialist, and a health aide, and these will be in 77 schools by the end of this calendar year and we hope will be in all of our public schools by 2011. We are supporting anti-bullying programs, substance abuse prevention programs, conflict resolution programs, mentoring programs, home visitation programs for newborns and for high

risk families, parent training and skill building programs, quality early childhood development programs with a strong focus on nurturing parental involvement. We have launched a 24 hour hot line for teens and their care givers available to provide information, referral, and crisis counseling in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole 7 days a week. (A complete listing and description of the programs that we fund is up on our website, I encourage you to visit and to learn more about how we are investing your tax dollars).

But clearly we need to do more to stop the bleeding.

At our July meeting County Commissioner and Children's Trust board member Barbara Jordan, challenged us to develop a program, perhaps more so to lead a movement, to end the senseless murder of our children. Trust chair David Lawrence took this call to action as fundamental to the vision and principles of The Children's Trust. And, our board of directors passed a resolution allocating \$9 million of Trust funds to be invested in three \$3 million dollar annual amounts and instructing the staff to receive proposals from community partners seeking to implement strategies to reduce violence in the 5 focus areas of Miami-Dade County most plagued by the problem. This has become The Children's Trust "Child Murder and Youth Violence Prevention Initiative". This Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) is posted on our website. By the way, the required letter of intent to apply for these funds is due September 25. And we expect approval of grant awards at our November board meeting on the 13 of that month.

Our procurement process is guided by County "conflict of interest and code of ethics" and something called the "Cone of Silence". And, what this means is that from the time a request for proposals is issued, until the time a recommendation is made to the board on awards to grantees, staff and board are prohibited from speaking about the ITN. Therefore I am in a situation where I cannot respond to your questions about the ITN, hopefully I can tell you a little bit about it as we have publicly noticed this gathering.

Let me quote from page 4 of the document, it says that: "much of the black-on-black violence in Miami is symptomatic of neighborhood-level dysfunction, growing out of years of segregation, oppression, institutional racism, and racial blindness in the larger community. The problem of

violence is inter-generational, often family-based, progressively worsens in young children who exhibit violence, and is demonstrably and statistically more visible in those neighborhoods also suffering from high rates of child neglect and abuse, delinquency, truancy, poor school achievement, low employment and extreme poverty. Violence in Miami's culture is fed by multiple forces: the disintegration of family life, media influences, growing substance abuse, the availability of weapons, the rise of gangs and gang-like behavior and increasing youth violence.

“Many children” it goes on, “are growing up surrounded by violence in their neighborhoods and do not anticipate a long life expectancy for themselves. Their anger, combined with lack of direction, opportunities, and skills, provides a breeding ground for violence and creates a cycle of hopelessness that may be transmitted to each succeeding generation. The lack of economic security and chronic stress associated with insecurity makes many problems worse, and people in these situations are more likely to turn to violence. Reducing violence demands raising hope”.

In a number of cities in Urban America, in Boston and Philadelphia, in Chicago and Denver residents have come together around an initiative called CeaseFire. It is providing hope, and is listed as a best practice in our ITN. In Chicago it has helped reduce shootings by 67% in the city's second most violent police beat in the first year. Subsequent replications in six other neighborhoods saw a 45 percent drop in shootings. In one police district the killings have declined from 72 in 2001 to 25 in 2004(*).

CeaseFire is a strategic community-based effort to stop shootings and killings through street-level youth outreach, public education, faith-based leader involvement, community mobilization and criminal justice participation.

Community partners implementing CeaseFire initiatives point to various keys to their success:

Community Partners are the organizations responsible for local implementation of CeaseFire. In doing so, they develop a coalition, implement activities to connect with and involve the entire community, promote CeaseFire and a new nonviolent “norm” through distribution of public education materials and provision of training. Partners hire and

support a team of outreach workers, they work with elected officials, community leaders, clergy and residents to ensure that “public education campaigns are launched” so that the community is on its way to less and less violence.

This has a lot to do with, as is stated in our ITN, changing values and valuing life. Murder is a problem for the whole community and nearly all are preventable. We hope that this initiative serves as a catalyst for uniting our community in coordinated action to stop the killing of our children and youth. We pledge our support and our resources to help make it happen.

Thank you!