website: www.refugeesusa.org. The United States Committee on Refugees (USCR) is also part of IRSA. USCR defends the rights of all uprooted people regardless of their nationality, race, religion, ideology, or social group. Their activities and findings are available at: www.refugees.org.

Red Cross: The Red Cross and similar relief agencies provide medications, vaccines, clean water, food and other essentials to victims of war, natural disasters and to refugee camps. Once initial needs are met, infant care, education, recreation and psychosocial supports are often provided. The International Committee of the Red Cross has also made tremendous strides in reuniting families separated due to war or natural disasters. In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo), for example, "Child Connect" used a satellite and wireless Internet Network for this purpose.

Save the Children: Together with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children has launched the Separated Children in Europe Statement of Good Practice. This program aims to establish a common policy and commitment to giving these children back their basic rights to a decent childhood, adolescence and a future. This is one of many international programs and information sources produced by Save the Children. In 2001 Save the Children produced a global report to address the UN Special Session on Children in New York City. *Children's Rights: A Second Chance* looks at the impact that local, national and international policies and practices have had on children over the last decade and outlines what needs to be done to improve the world for children and provides advice and a practical framework for world leaders to follow. To review report, go to www.savethechildren.net/stc/publicsite/newstc/resources.html

MEDIA: THE PROBLEM

All children are impressionable. But children under the age of 7 are especially influenced by what they see in the media. The experience of Kia and her mother demonstrates the impact news can have on children. It may create stress and anxiety, especially in situations where television channels and Internet sites report detailed and repetitive visual coverage and broadcast live events as they unfold. Chronic and persistent exposure to such violence can lead to fear, desensitization and, in some children, to aggressive behaviors. Adults, parents, teachers, and broadcasters must assume responsibility for protecting children from potentially harmful effects of exposure to violence through the media – television, movies, video games, and the Internet.

Violence in the movies and on TV is common. The Center for Media and Public Affairs reports that TV viewers and moviegoers are exposed to scenes of serious violence every four minutes and that even the most serious violence is often portrayed as harmless or justified. In the United States, an average child will see 100,000 acts of TV violence, including 8,000 murders, by the time he or she reaches 18 years of age, according to the National Institute on Media and the Family.

More than 1,000 scientific studies and reviews point to a casual connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. One factor in how much violence a child is exposed to is the number of hours of TV the child watches. German and Swedish studies show children from lower socio-economic groups watch significantly more than average levels of TV. In America, the average youth spends 1,023 hours per year watching TV but only 900 hours per year in school. Overall, the children most likely to be affected by media violence are the most vulnerable.

"A week after the terror in New York, 4-year-old Kia asked her mom when the planes would stop crashing and the buildings stop falling. Her mother reassured her that it was all over. 'No, Mom, it happened again last night and this morning,' said Kia. 'Honey, it's over,' her mother said with a hug. 'No! Come look,' Kia insisted and her mother once again saw the familiar images appear on the TV screen. 'But that's the same plane and the same building. That happened last week,' her mother explained. 'Oh,' said Kia, still convinced that hundreds of planes had attacked hundreds of buildings."

What Happened to the World, Bright Horizons Family Solutions

DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT OF MEDIA

Six prominent US medical groups (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Psychiatric Association) warn of these effects of media violence on children:

- Children will increase anti-social and aggressive behavior.
- Children may become less sensitive to violence and those who suffer from violence.
- Children may view the world as violent and mean, becoming more fearful of being a victim.
- Children will desire to see more violence in entertainment and real life.
- Children will view violence as an acceptable way to settle conflicts.

(US Congressional Public Health Summit, 2000)

In studies in Canada, children were found to have become significantly more aggressive two years after television was introduced in the community. Studies also show that children who prefer violent shows tend to watch more and more violent programming, as they get older, thus increasing its effect on them over time. *(Media Awareness Network)*

Other Canadian studies have shown that children are more likely to imitate aggression when the perpetrator is rewarded or at least not punished and when the violence is portrayed as being justified. Cross-cultural studies in Australia, Finland, Poland and the United States showed that children's identification with TV characters and their perception of how realistic they thought the programs were correlated with their aggressiveness. The more realistic the children believed the scenes to be, and the more the characters seemed to be like them, the more likely they were to try out the behavior. *(Health Canada)*

As influential as TV and the movies are, recent studies indicate that violent video games may be even more harmful to children. 60-90% of the most popular video games have violent themes. Two American Psychological Association studies say that playing video games such as "Doom," "Wolfenstein 3D" or "Mortal Kombat" can increase the player's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in real life. Because the games are interactive and engrossing, they require the player to identify with the aggressor.

Impact across developmental stages

Although some effects of media violence seem to span all ages, others are specific to certain ages based on stage of development, according to Media Awareness Network in Canada.

Infants and toddlers: Although no research has focused specifically on infants, some evidence indicates that if behavior from television is presented simply, infants can imitate it. As children grow into toddlers, they begin to become more interested in television and imitate what they see. The viewing patterns children establish, as toddlers will influence them throughout their lives. Since they prefer cartoons and programs that have characters who move quickly, toddlers are likely to be exposed to many violent programs.

Preschool age children: By preschool, children begin to actively search for meaning in the content, but are still especially attracted to vivid production features. Because vivid

production features often accompany television violence, preschoolers are predisposed to seek out and pay attention to violence, especially cartoon violence. They are unlikely to be able to put the violence in context since they lack developmental skills to see the subtlety conveying mitigating factors. *(Media Awareness Network)*

Elementary school age children: Elementary school is a critical period for understanding the effects of television on aggression. These children develop the attention span and cognitive ability to follow plots, make inferences about implicit content and recognize motivations of consequences of the characters' actions. By age eight, children are typically more sensitive to moderating influences in television content and will not become more aggressive if they see violence portrayed as evil. However, they are likely to become aggressive if they believe the violence reflects real life, identify with a violent hero or have aggressive fantasies. *(Media Awareness Network)*

Adolescents: During adolescence, children are able to reason and think abstractly, although they rarely invest much mental effort in watching TV. Adolescents in middle school and high school are much more likely than younger children to doubt the reality of television content and much less likely to identify with television characters. The small percentages of those who continue to believe in the reality of television and to identify with its violent heroes are the ones likely to be more aggressive, especially if they continue to fantasize about aggressive-heroic themes.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

Parenting
Parents are the best mediators of their children's viewing. They also can affect how their children learn from the media by discussing the content with them, as well as through the kinds of punishments they use and the role models they portray in resolving conflicts.

Programs impacting the general social culture
The Media Violence Network focuses on the need for programs that address the impact of promoting aggression has the general social culture. It presents research findings that show the preference for watching violent media, in combination with existing tendencies to aggressive and antisocial behavior produces the highest levels of aggressive behavior in childhood and into adult life.

The Center for Media Literacy also believes that media violence has a major effect on society, and it calls on us to take responsibility for the culture we are creating and passing on to our children. This includes the media industry: writers, producers and networks; advertisers; and parents. As a tool for achieving reform, the Center has developed a community education resource package - Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media.

Recent UNICEF initiatives have focused on media workshops. Materials that encourage the development of a fairer, more caring society have been used in these workshops in Albania, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Romania, Sri Lanka, East Asia and the South Pacific. In 1996, the International Save the Children Alliance submitted ideas to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for a series of child-focused media guidelines for journalists, advertisers, NGOs and other organizations concerned about children. Ombudspersons from Norway are leading the Oslo Challenge Project, working with media professionals to draw up an Implementation Guide on Media and Children.

"The desire for our children's well-being has always been the most universally cherished aspiration of mankind."

Kofi Annan

Earlier this year, representatives of leading television, advertising, corporate, government and civil society organizations in the East Asia-Pacific region agreed to and adopted recommendations for quality children's television. The recommendations, which will be widely disseminated throughout the region and at the Fourth World Summit on Media for Children to be held in 2004, in Rio de Janeiro, included:

- Making existing producers of quality productions aware of child rights issues and urging them to incorporate these issues in programs they are already producing.

- Encouraging and ensuring authentic participation of children and youth in the production of quality children's programming.

- Using integrated media to ensure maximum reach and relevance.

- Supporting training/production workshops in technical and storytelling techniques as well as exchange programs for children's program producers from developing countries with their counterparts in industrialized countries. *(UNICEF)*

Although successful programs can be found in all regions of the world, as adult citizens of the world we still have a long way to go to make the world fit for children. Strategies describing how you can help create that world are provided in the next section.

"A world fit for children is a just and peaceful world. It is one in which all children are given the love, care and nurturing they need to make a good start in life, where they can complete a basic education of good quality and, in adolescence, can develop their potential in a safe and supporting environment that will help them become caring and contributing citizens. This is the kind of world children deserve – and one that we as adults have an irrefutable obligation to create."

We The Children