

West Michigan Selected as only location in State and one of 20 Nationwide for Campaign to Improve Child Global Health

(Grand Rapids, MI, October 26, 2005) A coalition of local media, health organizations, educators, and relief organizations has received one of 20 grants nationwide to increase awareness of the 11 million children who die each year worldwide, many from preventable causes (pbs.org/rxforsurvival/campaign). The Rx for Child Survival campaign was created by WGBH and Vulcan Productions, with funding by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Merck Company Foundation, to coincide with their far-reaching multimedia project including the six-part television series, Rx for Survival ñ A Global Health Challenge, airing November 1ñ3, 2005 at 9 p.m. on PBS stations across the country. A locally produced WGVU-TV follow-up program will air at 11 p.m. on Thursday, November 3.

This West Michigan coalition is made up of WGVU Public Broadcasting, Grand Rapids Rotary East, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Youth Commonwealth, International Aid, Muskegon Community Health Project, and the World Affairs Council-West Michigan. Michael Walenta, General Manager of WGVU, affirms, “our local coalition is comprised of a most distinguished group of organizations who are working together to engage the public about the local to global links of child health and survival.

Children in West Michigan face some of the same easily preventable health problems as children in more impoverished areas of the world. These health issues include dehydration, malnutrition, diarrhea, and a low immunization rate, all of which can and do lead to more serious consequences, including death. Infectious disease and other health problems can be transported around the world in a matter of hours.

Recent outreach activities have included, “WGVU KidsDay at the Zoo,” a “Mall Health Screening Event,” and the “Grand Valley State University Intercultural Festival.” Future activities will include WGVU Radio reports, a WGVU-TV panel discussion, and a “local to global” reading exchange program between youth in West Michigan and Nicaragua.

“We are building a grassroots movement to educate the public about the preventable deaths of millions of children across the world,” states Mark Murray, President of Grand Valley State University. “We are honored to be of service to people on a global basis.”

In addition to local efforts, the U.S. Senate recently passed a resolution declaring November 2005 as Global Health Month. Moreover, last Wednesday, a Congressional Screening took place in Washington, D.C., drawing over 500 invitees, including legislators, health and human service organizations, and two of the coalitions; Maryland Public Television, and WGVU, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

“Adequate health care and a proper education will determine the quality of life for our world's children and the future security of all people and nations,” said Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, who attended the Washington, D.C. event. “I applaud and support the efforts of our local coalition to meet these goals.”

Leadership is also being provided by Congressman Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, a member of the Congressional Global Health Caucus. “I am committed to working, both on the House Floor and at Battle Creek's Health Center, to provide quality health care. The Rx for Survival project lends itself to this endeavor and I know it will have a positive impact on children at home and abroad.”

More information on the program Rx for Survival ñ A Global Health Challenge, as well as the national Rx for Child Survival and the local From Surviving to Thriving campaigns can be found at wgvu.org.

WGVU's continued mission is to provide educational, informative, and entertaining programs and events to the West Michigan community as a service of Grand Valley State University.