

Question and Answer Prep Sheet for Spokesperson

First Annual National Multiple Births Awareness Day – May 28, 2005

Q – Why is there a need for National Multiple Births Awareness Day in Canada?

A – Multiple-birth individuals and families face many challenges that are not commonplace to the general Canadian population. We believe that it is in the best interests of all Canadians to share some of that information through the media at an annual national event.

Q – Why May 28th?

A – This is the birth date of the Dionne quintuplets. Public interest from their birth (May 28, 1934) throughout their childhood highlighted many stereotypes about multiples that the Dionnes themselves sought to break down in their later lives. While many were concerned about their well-being, their exploitation by the media has left a lasting mark in Canadian history. Many lessons were learned through this experience, not the least of which is the acknowledgement of the importance of bonding -- between multiple-birth children, with their siblings, and with their parents. The Dionnes taught us that individuality is crucial to a healthy multiple-births relationship. National Multiple Births Awareness Day seeks to build upon the lessons of their life experiences to raise awareness of the unique needs and challenges faced by multiple-birth children and their families.

Q – What is the theme of National Multiple Births Awareness Day for 2005?

A – A call to dialogue regarding the current provisions for maternity, parental and compassionate care leave under the federal Employment Insurance Program.

Q – What would you like to see changed?

A – We recommend including pre-term and low birth weight births to current compassionate care eligibility, and propose extending the period of available leave beyond six weeks. Further, with reference to maternity and parental leave, we suggest extending leave for all incidents of multiple births to one year per newborn.

Q – Do you have medical or scientific research to back up these recommendations?

A – Research analyzed to date by MBC acknowledges the heightened importance of bonding in the early years of a multiple-birth child's life (with parents, multiple-birth siblings, and other siblings), as well as the increased stress and strain imposed on the family structure with the arrival of multiples. Ongoing research on children's early developmental years will further clarify many questions related to these issues, but it is clear that there are more risks involved with carrying and delivering multiples, as it is also clear that the adjustment to the arrival of multiples can be strenuous, putting the health and well-being of children and parents at risk. This is the basis of MBC's recommendations to extend leave. At the moment, MBC is investigating precedents set in leave programs in other countries as benchmarks from which to measure possible options for Canada.

Q – Are there other countries that have special provisions to address multiple births?

A – Yes. In Sweden, an extra six months leave per child is in effect. In Iceland, the arrival of multiples can afford families an extra three months leave. In Italy, a total of twenty months of leave is accorded to incidences of multiple-births; and in Luxembourg parents can take an additional four weeks' leave.

Q – How can the supportive public assist in promoting this year's theme?

A – Write letters. Send them to – The Honourable Lucienne Robillard, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6. Simply state that there is a need to review the Employment Insurance Program to better address the needs of multiple-births families, and describe how an extension of leave would have benefited your family.

