

PE1683/B

The Multiple Births Foundation submission of 16 May 2018

Thank you for the invitation to provide the views of the Multiple Births Foundation on the action called for in this petition.

The Multiple Births Foundation (MBF) is a charity which has 30 years' experience of working with multiple birth families. Professional advice, information and support is provided through specialist clinics, telephone consultations and email. Recently the MBF has collaborated with Birmingham City University (BCU) to jointly establish the Elizabeth Bryan Multiple Births Centre which will combine the academic prowess and range of disciplines within BCU with the MBF experience of working directly with multiple birth families. The EBMBCC aims to improve the care and support to families with twins, triplets and higher multiples through the development of research and educational/professional development programmes and resources for health and allied professionals.

The MBF supports the petition and welcomes the actions already proposed by the Scottish Government in the submission of the 19 April 2018.

Financial Support

In our experience the impact of financial pressures on multiple birth families can contribute significantly to the stress of parenting twins, triplets or more. Although the increased cost of basic clothes and equipment is obvious they also require immediate expenditure and cannot be handed down as may happen with single children. Less well recognised is the need for some families to move to larger accommodation and to buy cars big enough to transport the children. Being able to leave the home for medical appointments and to socialise is critical as social isolation is one of the factors which frequently contribute to the higher rates of depression for parents with multiples.

Couples usually expect and plan to have one child at a time and many budget for this on the basis of both parents returning to work. They are often shocked to find they are expecting a multiple birth and this predicted income may be significantly

reduced as the cost of child care for two or three children often exceeds the second income. Parents may also be torn between working longer hours to increase their income but this can impose even greater stress on the partner being left to cope with the practicalities of caring for the babies adding to additional psychological pressures for both parents. Single parents may be in even greater need of financial support as they may not be able to combine work and child care at all.

Physically parenting twins and more is very demanding and for many additional help from grandparents and other family members is not available. Parental exhaustion is common and this can be manifested in physical and mental health problems which can result in additional costs to the health and social services for medical and sometimes respite care. Not least, bonding with the children is more difficult and this can lead to longer term relationship problems for the parents and children, in some case requiring referral to both adult and young people and children's mental health services. Parents of multiples have more relationship problems often leading to separation leaving one to cope with the stress of caring for the children.

Providing funding for additional practical help or organising direct help for families with multiples could prevent some of the longer term health and social problems which may arise.

As nearly 60% of multiples are born before 37 weeks gestation and about 10% before 32 weeks compared with 1% of singletons, many of these babies require hospital care for longer – sometimes several weeks or even months. Parents are encouraged to spend as much time as possible with their babies and increased paternity leave in these circumstances would help enormously to relieve at least some of the great psychological pressures of caring for preterm babies. Even though many twins are born at 37 weeks these babies are still slightly less mature and likely to be of lower birth weight so even though healthy they often need several days in hospital and require more frequent feeding when discharged home. The MBF strongly supports enhanced paternity leave in these cases as well. Tamba (The Twins and Multiple Births Association) has published reports documenting how multiples affect families financially, emotionally, socially and physically. These include *“The Effects of Twins and Multiple Births on Families and Their Living Standards”* and *“Cost of Childcare in Households with Multiple Births”*.

Why more professional help is needed

In addition to the increased financial help for parents they also need high standard family centred care from health and allied professionals which is critical to ensure the best outcomes for multiple birth children. The practicalities of caring for multiple birth children and the emotional support parents require is generally not well understood or provided by professionals to the level required. Like Tamba, the MBF is aware through our experience and feedback from families that this is often lacking. Care pathways for multiples and specialist midwives and health visitors could make a huge difference to the lives of these families. Although this would need some extra financial resource equally important is the cultural change in how care is delivered and recognition that multiple birth families need different and more specific support. The MBF welcomes the Scottish Government's support for the Tamba event to raise professional awareness and promote good practice in the care of multiples. Most importantly this good practice must be fully integrated and sustained as a routine for all multiple birth families to be really effective. The NICE clinical guideline 129 on Multiple Pregnancy has a recommendation for a multidisciplinary team to deliver specialist care for women with a multiple pregnancy, This is the first step in the care pathway for multiple birth families. The implementation of this and all the other recommendations in the NICE guideline throughout the UK is strongly supported by the MBF.

Breast feeding is a very good example of where more professional help could significantly increase breast feeding rates for twins and more. Research confirms that women with multiples are less likely to sustain breast feeding and many report that they don't continue to breast feed because of the lack of specialist help to give them the confidence and support required. The evidence based MBF publication "*Guidance for Health Professionals on Feeding Twins, Triplets and Higher Order Births*" covers this in detail with recommendations for training and practice.

The MBF would be pleased to provide further information if required.