



PROJECT SINGLE MOMS
It's About a Hand Up, Not a Hand Out

An Open Response from Project Single Moms™ A National Empowerment Movement for Single Moms

NADYA SULEMAN...PROUD MOM OF 14...BUT UNDERNEATH IT ALL...

February 12, 2009: The home page of Ms. Suleman's website states that she is the "proud mom of 14." Even though many find it hard to believe that she is content with her decision to parent 14 young children on her own, underneath the pride is a scared, lonely, confused young woman.

After all the media glitz and attention...what's next for the single mom of 14...a book deal...a movie deal...a national talk show on parenting? Give me a break. By no means does Project Single Moms stand in judgment of Ms. Suleman for her actions, however, we are holding her accountable for them.

There are over 10.4 million single moms in America. Unfortunately, those single moms who knowingly choose to make irresponsible decisions and choices perpetuate the stereotypes placed on single moms by mainstream society as irresponsible women who need to be saved from ourselves.

It's unfortunate that media generally focuses on revealing and covering stories of single moms amidst some form of controversy or those perpetuating stereotypes. Ms. Suleman is a case in point as well as the "Black in America" program featured on *CNN* last summer portraying and displaying their "stereotypical view" of single moms and single dads of color in this country. Ms. Suleman does not represent the majority of single moms in America.

Fortunately, in this case Ms. Suleman is a Caucasian woman. Yes, we beg to differ with anyone that says that the news stories would have not been skewed differently if it was a woman of color acting so recklessly by bringing more children into this world that she can not afford. We seriously doubt that a woman of color would have received the level of national media attention and given the fair opportunity to share her views. Let's not be naïve to the fact that race does play a role in how you are perceived and received by mainstream America in this country.

Now back to Ms. Suleman. While we do not condone her actions or decisions, we do believe that she believes that her choice to give birth to more children was in both her and her children's best interest. Most single moms will attest that they will do anything necessary to provide and care for their children. So, while it appears to others on the surface that there is no way Ms. Suleman can properly care for her children, we believe that she will do everything in her power to do so. That includes capitalizing on her new found fame as the single mother of octuplets and 14 children. Underneath the criticism and threats she has received, there are some soft hearted people that will sympathize with her, and if not for her, they will feel sorry for her children and step up to come to their aid in some way.

Our work as a national empowerment movement for single moms becomes even more challenging as a result of Ms. Suleman's actions which will have some direct and indirect ramification for the millions of single moms in America. There are already several state legislators proposing to past bills that will relinquish a woman's right to bear children and mandate fertility for those women they feel need to be saved from themselves.

Ms. Suleman's action jeopardizes the efforts of the many women who have fought to protect a woman's right to choose.

Recent studies released by the Center for Disease Control indicates an increase in teen pregnancies nationwide. Ms. Suleman's actions and the glamorization of her actions will influence the choices and decisions of teenage mothers and those who may believe that you can become rich and famous for having multiple children out of wedlock or as a single woman. There are many teenage girls who will assume that Ms. Suleman's decision is acceptable behavior for them as well.

As we listened intently to Ms. Suleman's interviews to try to understand why she would choose what many consider an unconventional lifestyle as a single mom raising 14 children on her own, it is evident that she is a woman with deeply rooted emotional issues. She admits selfishly to her deep need to connect with others, in this case her children. She does not seem to realize that she is making decisions to feel her own personal needs at the expense of her children. After the spotlights go away and realities sets in that she has the sole responsibility of caring for and raising her children, she may have second, third and fourth thoughts about her decision.

We admire her strong will to stand firm on her choices and her decision to go back to school to pursue her Master's degree. However, Ms. Suleman is somewhat delusional and gives the impression that it will be easy for her to manage school and caring for her children. Student loans are not designed to live on and are not guaranteed. While we wish her all the best and every success in her endeavors, we implore Ms. Suleman to deal with the realities of her choices. Although she may think she does not need others, now is the time for her to reach out and embrace every offer of help and support which comes her way.

There are many single moms in our movement who have triumphed over some of life's most difficult challenges. They have learned the importance of not taking a bad situation and making it worse by making irresponsible decisions. They accept responsibility for their actions and have learned from past mistakes to move their lives forward in order to raise healthy, productive children and to create safe, stable households. This is representative of most single moms in America. These women are vibrant, hardworking and viable members of society who are not often recognized for making good choices and go unnoticed by mainstream society including media.

Now is the time for Ms. Suleman to accept the realities of her choices, acknowledge that she may have stepped over the line of irresponsibility and hold herself accountable for her actions. Underneath it all, Ms. Suleman is a woman crying out for help and attention. Let's be quicker to offer help in the form of mental, emotional and spiritual support instead of throwing criticism, pity and death threats her way.

This response was written on behalf the Project Single Moms movement by Stephanie M. Clark. Ms. Clark is the founder & CEO of My Daughter's Keeper, Inc., author of *Life As A Single Mom: It Isn't Easy, Or Is It?*, a mother & daughter relationship coach and national spokesperson for Project Working Moms, a national online education program empowering single moms to pursue education.

Project Single Moms (PSM) is a national empowerment movement for single moms created to organize and mobilize single moms in an effort to create and identify opportunities to enhance their quality of life. PSM currently represents single moms in 24 states. Project Single Moms is managed by the national 501(c)3 educational and self-development organization My Daughter's Keeper, Inc. based in New Jersey. For more information, visit www.projectsinglemoms.com or www.mydaughterskeeper.org. For media inquiries, contact Stephanie M. Clark, founder & CEO, My Daughter's Keeper, Inc. at sclark@projectsinglemoms.com or (732) 331-5314 (cell).