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JUVENILE ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH

Statement by:

The Honourable Catherine S. Callbeck

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

THE SENATE

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JUVENILE ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, as a result of Senator Comeau's timely inquiry on arthritis, we have heard about its impact on Canadians from all walks of life, in all age groups. One of these groups is our own young people who are affected by juvenile arthritis. It may cause daily pain and diminished quality of life as these young people struggle to keep up with their regular childhood activities. Children may develop disabilities that hinder them at school and at home.

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However, most people do not know that children can get arthritis. In order to increase the public's knowledge of this disease, the Arthritis Society has designated March as Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Month. Juvenile arthritis is one of the most common chronic conditions that affect children — more common than childhood diabetes or cystic fibrosis.

While it has been traditionally held that juvenile arthritis affects 1 in 1,000 babies, toddlers, children and teenagers under the age of 16, the most recent data suggests that the figure may be closer to 4 in 1,000. The causes of juvenile arthritis are still unknown.

The Arthritis Society in my home province of Prince Edward Island has named a young grade 3 student as its Arthritis Hero as part of the awareness month. Katie Davidson was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis at the age of 7. She takes medication to help her symptoms, but that medication makes her feel sick. She goes to physiotherapy for her legs. Some days she finds it difficult to walk, and stairs have become too much of a challenge for this young lady, so her family has moved to a single-storey home. Despite these problems, Katie is determined not to let her arthritis stop her and has big plans for the future.

During the month of March, activities and outreach are being undertaken across the country. Fundraising done during the campaign will help to provide educational programs and services, as well as support for research projects.

Honourable senators, juvenile arthritis can take a terrible toll on the lives of Canadian children and youth, as well as their families and their friends. I commend the Arthritis Society, its staff and volunteers, for the difference they are making, and I wish them the very best in their quest to eliminate juvenile arthritis.
