

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON HOMELESSNESS IN YELLOWKNIFE

June 8, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, we have heard debate this week about possible solutions to homelessness in Yellowknife and how they are going to be paid for. I welcome the announcement by the Minister responsible for Homelessness of additional money for homelessness initiatives both for semi-independent units located within existing shelters and independent units under the Housing First model. Either way, more people who are now homeless will be housed and that's the goal here.

I want to talk about expectations Yellowknifers may have about making homelessness go away. It's not going to go away. This new investment will give people who are now homeless options to obtain housing. This is strictly voluntary. If they don't want housing, they don't have to have it. If they want to live outside or couch surf and continue sleeping at emergency shelters, that is their choice. I expect a good uptake on the new housing options - in the range of 80 per cent, according to City research - but not everyone will want to participate.

The other reason homelessness is not going to go away is because of migration from the communities to Yellowknife. Any of my colleagues here in this House could walk downtown and identify constituents who are homeless here. A major driver of migration is the inadequacy of housing available in the small communities. People come here because there is more housing here, whether shelters, transitional housing, public housing or market rentals.

Another driver of migration is access to services that are only offered in Yellowknife, such as specialized medical treatment or greater support for disabled children. Other reasons people come, in no particular order: to take a job, to be reunited with family members and to have easier access to alcohol. No surprises there.

Migration seems to be increasing, Mr. Speaker, at least anecdotally, and more migrants are homeless. As the City of Yellowknife has reported, "the costs of this demographic shift, including intrinsic costs, are borne by the City." That's in spite of the fact they have no mandate or budget for this burden, except for federal government Housing First money. There is no question that, again quoting from the report, "there are insufficient resources for housing and health services for those migrating from other communities."

The Federal and Territorial Governments are set to reverse this trend by funding additional housing for people who are homeless. This is good news for the many people waiting for homes, for the City of Yellowknife and for Yellowknife residents. This collaboration is the way forward for finding real solutions to this long-term problem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.