

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 190-18(2): REDUCING THE NEED FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER SERVICES

June 8, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my statement today dealt with the issue of migration and how there will always be some need for emergency shelters in Yellowknife, but probably and hopefully not to the extent that they are available now. My question for the Minister responsible for Homelessness, is: what planning is she doing with the shelters to reduce their bed nights over time? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for Homelessness.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's actually a few things that we're doing to reduce the shelter bed nights, the amount of people that are staying in the shelters within the Yellowknife Community. For one, we are working with the City of Yellowknife with their Housing First Project. We're also working with the shelters to implement a Housing First Project within their own so that they can move some of the people that are in their units into more of an independent living structure. And finally, we are working within the communities as well to implement emergency shelters within the community-- three identified this year, so that they will have options and they don't have to migrate to Yellowknife simply because they have no place to live. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. A dimension of my question is whether the Minister can foresee a time when funding for emergency shelters will decline because Housing First has taken effect in Yellowknife?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: That's actually a very difficult question because I recognize that the term of the Government is only four years, which doesn't give us a lot of time and really hard to evaluate during that period of time. I am hoping that the next Legislative Assembly will carry forward the work and to move forward within the Housing First model and to get people more independently housed.

There will always be a need for emergency shelters though, and that's just the reality of shelters throughout the world, and especially within the Northwest Territories because this community of Yellowknife is a very transient community with our mines, et cetera. And we're a magnet community: that was acknowledged by the Member in her opening statement. So there will always be a need for emergency shelters within our community but, hopefully, as she stated, that it will go down as long as we are more proactive in trying to move people, give them the skills and the assets so that they can live independently. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for that. So, Mr. Speaker, to give a specific example here, the Housing First Project in Yellowknife plans to house 20 people in the next three years. So does that mean there will be a decline in the shelter capacity of 20 people?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to be able to say yes, that there would be a decline by 20 people. However, in the short period of time that I have been a Minister, I have noticed that there's been an increase within homeless people within the community. So I am not as optimistic, and I would have to say that probably this is going to be a

long-standing issue that we will have to dedicate a lot of time within the next, not only the four years, but for a longer period. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that. One approach that has taken in Calgary is to make it as a goal that people who live in emergency shelters won't spend more than five days there, that they have a rapid rehousing program. So can the Minister envision setting a goal of that kind where there is a commitment, that people will stay in emergency shelters for short periods of time so that they aren't stuck on the housing continuum the way they are now?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would really love to be able to say that there would be a goal within a short period that says that people would not stay in emergency shelters for five years. However, like we had stated, we are working in partnership with the City of Yellowknife. Within three years, they plan to have 20 people housed, within the shelter format, we're looking to have 30 people, that's only 50 people. We will still, even after those people are housed, we will still have a huge population of people that are homeless. So I think that the goal of five days within a shelter is still a ways off. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.