

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

POVERTY REDUCTION INVESTMENTS

February 6, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, several national anti-poverty advocacy organizations released reports in November. The news for Canada as a whole and the NWT in particular is pretty grim: the fact is one in five children live in poverty; food bank use is going up, and so is the use of emergency shelters. The latter point was starkly confirmed when CBC North reported in the fall that emergency shelters are so full that people are being turned away. Their options are to ask people to sleep in RCMP cells. We know that some people have been walking to the hospital to sleep in chairs there in the lobby and others have been sleeping over a warm air vent. It's my concern that a cold exposure death is almost inevitable, and yet it is also preventable.

All of this news coincided with the 4th Annual GNWT Anti-Poverty Round Table held at the end of November in Inuvik. The major takeaway from the gathering was that the department has launched a new anti-poverty website and it will continue to administer the anti-poverty fund. Neither initiative is anything like the transformative action we need on poverty.

The Anti-Poverty Fund has funded some good work, mostly related to providing short-term help often in the form of food, but providing food is not the answer to hunger. Increasing local food production is a better alternative. As the saying goes, give a man a fish, he'll eat today; teach a man to fish, he'll eat for a lifetime. Investments in housing and homelessness have also been meagre given the size of the fund.

The Minister of Health and Social Services is fond of saying government can't solve the problem of poverty on its own. That's true, but only government has the capacity to make investments that will create systemic solutions to poverty. We need more housing, a basic income guarantee for those on low income, and investments in food production and distribution. The GNWT has obtained money from Ottawa to fund emergency shelter renovations and assist Housing First, but has yet to make a truly substantial investment of its own beyond the Anti-Poverty Fund.

Delegates in Inuvik looked at indicators suggested by the Minister's staff that will tell us whether progress is being made in six areas of poverty reduction, including housing, food security, and income assistance. Unless and until there is significant government investment in poverty reduction, the indicators will show that nothing much has improved and some people are worse off, as the national reports reveal. The band aids we now provide are not a solution; they trap people in poverty, sometimes for generations. It's well past time for that to change. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.