

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

SENIORS DAY PROGRAM

May 29, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the mandate of this 18th Assembly commits the government to take action so that seniors can age in place, and this is also a priority of the Standing Committee on Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about aging in place, we most often talk about housing, particularly renovations that make it possible for elders to remain in their own homes. However, in addition to meeting seniors' physical needs, we also need to consider how to meet their mental health and well-being needs.

Day programs, like the Elders' Circle at Avens, gave seniors who lived in their own homes an opportunity to socialize in a structured program, and it gave their families caring for them a break. Daycare for seniors and daycare for children is built around the same concept of providing a safe and stimulating environment that promotes socialization and skill development or, in the case of seniors, retention. It also provides vital respite for families. Unfortunately, Avens shuttered their program last December. The Yellowknife Association for Community Living stepped in for a few months, but that program was never meant to be more than a temporary solution. Now there is no program at all.

A constituent of mine, who is 97 years old, attended the Elders' Circle for over 15 years. She made friends with other participants and staff, but now she spends most of her days home alone while her family is at work. Her friends are not able to come to see her, and she is unable to see them. She is lonely and isolated, according to her son. Of course, he is very concerned about her and the decrease in her quality of life.

There were seven other seniors in the Elders' Circle program who now have nowhere to go. No doubt there are others who, as they age, would benefit from a program like this to promote their social well-being.

Mr. Speaker, the need for this kind of program to provide socialization for seniors and respite for their families is going to increase as our population ages. I do not want elders who choose to age in place to be lonely and isolated. Keeping elders in their own homes is a more cost-effective option for government than creating long-term care beds for them, as the Minister knows, but there is more to life than having a bed to sleep in. The government must step in immediately to ensure that there is daytime programming available for the growing population of seniors in Yellowknife. I will have questions for the Minister Responsible for Seniors. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.