

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

IMPACTS OF SOBERING CENTRE ON YELLOWKNIFE

September 26, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, social issues are again top of mind for Yellowknife residents, according to a recent survey by the city. This is especially true for people like me and my family who live downtown. On our street, we see public intoxication and the negative behaviour that comes with it on an almost daily basis; that includes an attempted break-in by an intoxicated person this summer that frightened us when it happened and cost us thousands of dollars in repairs to the doors and doorframe.

Have we thought about moving to a different part of the city? You bet, but we're staying put and here's why. The City of Yellowknife and the GNWT are finally making a serious effort to tackle social issues downtown. The city is funding a street outreach program that has already provided more than a thousand rides to people who are intoxicated in the downtown core. I've called the outreach service myself because I've been concerned about people stumbling down the street. The van has arrived promptly to offer them a ride to a safe place. Mr. Speaker, I commend the City of Yellowknife for funding this service and the people who staff the program.

One of the primary destinations for the street outreach van was the temporary sobering centre located at the Yellowknife arena. Once it opened in July it helped hundreds of people by providing a barebones but safe place to sleep off intoxication. Mr. Speaker, this is how harm reduction works. It acknowledges a problem and provides a constructive solution that is client-focused. I commend the GNWT for providing this service and the staff who work on the front line.

I congratulate the government for finding a long-term location for the sobering centre. It's downtown, and downtown is where it needs to be. There's no use putting it where the people aren't; they won't use it, and the other harm reduction measures won't count for anything, either. It's better to have the centre where it will be used, where clients can access programming, housing, and other supports in the area. For residents and businesses who are unhappy with the new location, I ask you to be patient.

These two initiatives, the street outreach program and the sobering centre, have not only met the safety needs of intoxicated people, they have made the downtown a more hospitable place for the rest of us. That doesn't mean all the problems downtown have been solved, but there has been a noticeable improvement. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.