

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 914-18(2): YELLOWKNIFE ADULT DAY PROGRAM

October 3, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. As I said in my statement, the closure of the Elders Circle adult day program is clearly not temporary. The service provider has no plans to restart it because they cannot afford to do so. My question is: what is the Minister going to do to get an adult day program up and running in Yellowknife? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to meet with the board of Avens earlier in September, and it was clear to me at that meeting that they are very passionate about the programs and services that they provide. There is certainly an interest in doing a day program, but at this point in time, they indicated that they want to focus on the delivery of core services that they are providing so that they can continue to provide an incredibly high level of services to their residents. Right now, given some of the financial pressures, they had to make some hard choices, and they are focused on their clients.

They have indicated to me that at some point, obviously, they would like to move forward with a day program, but their first priority has to be their core services. They have indicated to me that when they do explore the possibility of establishing a day program, they are certainly going to use the report that was done in cooperation between the Department of Health and Social Services and Avens at the foundation for moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: The Minister had his official study the Elders Circle program at Avens' request, and I believe that a report was produced by territorial staff and shared with Avens in the summer. When is the Minister going to make this report available to the Standing Committee on Social Development and to the public?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member has described the process. She did not get it exactly right. In fact, the Department of Health and Social Services collaborated with the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services authority and Avens staff to conduct a review of the previous day program; so it is a joint report that was prepared.

We did provide that final copy to the board, who has had an opportunity to review it, and they have indicated that they are comfortable with us sharing this document. It is a shared document. I was not comfortable releasing it without their support. They have indicated their support, and I will be sharing it with Members this week.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's willingness to share that report. The report, I gather, sets out what is required for a quality and safe program for elders in Yellowknife. My question is: how is the Minister going to provide that? Does it all depend on Avens, or is he going to put out an RFP so that other non-profits can bid on it?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Our first priority is to work with Avens because they have been a high-quality provider of services in the past, and in many ways, they still are. They are providing high-quality core services to their residents. When Avens does consider re-establishing the program once their finances are in order, they were hoping to use or they, rather, intend to use the report that was provided and will be shared to help them design a safe, effective, and responsive day program. Our first priority is to work with them to see if we could find a way to get to that place. If we cannot, obviously, we will have to look at alternatives, but in the meantime, to start, we are working with Avens.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Avens was very clear that they have no plans to restart this day program. I do not understand what the delay is in the Minister finding a new service provider or a collection of service providers, how about Yellowknife Seniors and Yellowknife Day Care, to provide this day program. We cannot be held hostage. Our elders cannot be held hostage because Avens is experiencing its own financial issues. The Minister needs to be proactive in providing a day program. When is that going to happen? Mahsi.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: To be clear, Avens indicated that they are not planning to reinitiate the day program at this time, but there is certainly consideration for doing it at some point. Because they have been such a valuable partner in the provision of services to seniors in Yellowknife, we are hoping to continue that relationship, but I have acknowledged that, should we not be able to do that, we will certainly look at other alternatives. Immediately, our first priority needs to be working with Avens to make sure that they are delivering and continue to deliver the high-quality core programs they do, which would hopefully lead to a position where they can support day programs. They never said, Mr. Speaker, that they are never going to deliver a day program. They said at this time their priority has to be core services. That is what we are helping them do, Mr. Speaker.