

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 97-18(3):
ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF CHILDCARE**

February 13, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my statement today, the second largest expense for a family of four in Yellowknife is childcare, amounting to \$16,000 a year to provide full-time care for a child and after-school care for another child. To that end, I want to ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about the recent study of childcare in the NWT that revealed that families had difficulty accessing childcare subsidies. I am wondering what the Minister is doing to make it easier for low-income families to qualify for childcare subsidies? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any constituent's issues that the Member has coming by, I encourage you to come and see me at my office, and we can do it on a case-by-case basis. Our government has made improvements to subsidies that we give to all of our daycares throughout the Northwest Territories. We have 11 communities that currently do not have daycare services or access throughout the NWT, and that is a focus and a priority to try to get childcare and daycare services to those 11 communities that currently do not have that.

We do have a junior kindergarten program that we have implemented territorially this year, and we are continuing to monitor how that is working out, but any concerns that the Member has in terms of families that have approached her, or any Members in this House, I encourage them to come and see me at my office or send me an e-mail, and we can work on addressing that.

Our client service officers also work very hard with our income assistance clients to give them the services that they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I just want to reiterate that the living wage is to enable to families to earn enough money to stand on their own feet. We hear all the time in this House that the best remedy for a social program is a job. These are people who have jobs, but they are not earning enough money to make ends meet, unless they are getting \$22.24 an hour in Yellowknife. To that end, how is the Minister going to reduce the second-largest expense that these families have, which is childcare? What can he do to help working families afford the cost of childcare for their families?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, we have made changes to our childcare subsidy programs. Myself and the Member from Yellowknife Centre actually attended the opening of the new daycare here in Yellowknife and increased spaces that allowed for more of all ages that can access the daycare programs.

As I mentioned, we have provided junior kindergarten to four-year-olds across the territory, which on average saves anywhere from \$8,000 to \$12,000 for families that put their children into the junior kindergarten program. There is a lot of work that has been

done, and we continue to work with our daycares to make sure that they get all the opportunities for the childcare subsidy that is provided to them.

MS. GREEN: As with many things in the NWT, what is required in Yellowknife is not the same thing that is required in Paulatuk. In Yellowknife, we have an affordability question. In other small communities, a third of them in the NWT, they have accessibility problems; there are no daycares. Can the Minister craft a solution that takes into account the needs of different kinds of communities in providing affordable and accessible childcare?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, it is a priority of this government to provide early childhood development childcare as well, and in those 11 communities, I do agree with the Member that what is needed in Paulatuk is not needed the same here in Yellowknife. I think, with the junior kindergarten program, we have opened up more spaces here in Yellowknife. The new daycare opening last month was something that was very beneficial to families here in Yellowknife, and I will continue to work with groups and organizations to get the licensing and make sure that anyone who wants to open up daycare or childcare spaces, that we work with them to make sure that they have the opportunity to provide those services to our families across the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday during Committee of the Whole the Minister told us he had signed off an agreement with the federal government on childcare, and he didn't provide any other detail on that, except that there would be money carried over into the next fiscal year. Could the Minister please advise us what this agreement says about affordability and access ability of childcare? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, we did sign off on an agreement with the Government of Canada to provide more early childhood programming throughout the Northwest Territories. We are waiting on the signing from the federal government in order to make sure that the action plan that we are developing through that signing was agreed to by both parties. We will get information and send that to committee in a letter to give them an update on how we are using those dollars to provide affordable and accessible childcare throughout the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.