

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 337-18(3): HOUSING POLICY FOR FAMILIES

May 31, 2018

MS. GREEN: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation and responsible for Homelessness. Is the Minister satisfied that having six people in a bachelor apartment with a hot plate and a bar fridge is appropriate housing for them, and not a priority case for the Housing Authority? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'm don't. I don't think anybody in this House would feel that way, or even agree to that. I think that, as a government, we try our best to house individuals in the situations that were mentioned. We have a homelessness working group that we're working with to address these issues.

In terms of anybody who is in a situation, as the Member had mentioned in her statement, the NWT Housing Corporation has formed a new partnership, called the NGO Rental Partnership Program, also referred to as rapid re-housing, to support the YWCA, the Yellowknife Women's Society, with housing stability for residents who they serve. This support is very flexible and can be used for such things as damage deposits, rent supplements, or rapid re-housing. This partnership is designed to support households, like I said, throughout the NWT, as we had mentioned.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a reality. There is a reality that we do have long waiting lists on housing throughout the Northwest Territories, specifically in our regional centres, and here in Yellowknife is our biggest. We try our best, we try to address it, and I do want to affirm that staff at the NWT Housing Corporation works diligently, they work hard, they try their best to house any individual in any circumstances, as well as our staff at the local housing organizations, as well as our regional offices. We've developed partnerships with NGOs, we've worked with community governments, Indigenous governments, to address homelessness and housing issues.

Mr. Speaker, there are realities out there, and I just want to let the Member know that my staff are working very hard to try to address these issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: What I take from that answer is there's no shortage of programs, but somehow there's a disconnect where this family, who is living in inadequate circumstances, is not being hooked up with a variety of programs that they may be eligible for as a low-income family. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, they're a working family. They are not on income assistance. So they are trying to make it on their own initiative, and somehow there is this gap between what they need and what is on offer. How can the Minister bridge that gap?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: First of all, we have done a few things. We have done a Housing Engagement Survey in 2017, and we're going to do another one in January of

2019. With that, we're developing these community housing plans for all 33 communities in the Northwest Territories, and through that survey, what we've developed is we're doing a strategic renewal within the NWT Housing Corporation. We're going to be reviewing all of our NWT Housing Corporation programs, and we're going to be reviewing them for potential improvements, as well as looking at improvements in our homelessness programs. We continue to do compassionate training for our staff at the LHO, so they know the clientele that they're working with, so that they can help them in the circumstances that they are in. Anybody in that situation, as long as they get on the waiting list for the NWT Housing Corporation, then they can apply for income assistance to help them with market rent.

Unfortunately, here in Yellowknife, another issue, too, is the market availability, as well as in some of our regional centres. So we're doing a strategic renewal, and hopefully that will address that. Income threshold is something that we might want to take a look at, as well, something that was done with income assistance.

MS. GREEN: I need the Minister to come down to the level of the client. A strategic renewal is not something this family is going to participate in, is going to directly benefit from. What they need is more appropriate housing. The Minister is telling me with endless lists that there is this, that, and the other program, and my question is: how are people on the waiting list made aware of these programs which may resolve their problems?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I want to say, again, that the staff at the LHO offices, local housing organizations, the regional offices, are getting out into the communities. I've instructed them to go out into the communities, let them know what programs are available to them, and make sure that any clients who come in are aware of programs such as the Homelessness Assistance Fund, subsidized rent programs. We also have, as I mentioned, the NGO rental partnership program that will help individuals in such cases. It is on a case-by-case basis, however, and I encourage any families, anyone who is in a situation where they're looking for housing, to go and speak to their LHO officers to make sure that they're informed of all the programs, all the services, that they're entitled to.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister has suggested at one point that the family apply for income assistance, and that's in spite of the fact that one parent is working full-time and making the effort to provide for his family. We keep saying in this House, "A good job is a social program." Is that really the best suggestion the Minister has, to facilitate more spending of government money rather than addressing the problem at hand? I still don't understand how this family is going to access suitable housing. Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: One thing that this government does is it does provide a lot of social supports to residents of the Northwest Territories. It was only an option. I didn't say to go and do it. It is an option for anybody who finds themselves in that situation or needs a little bit of extra help. We do have the Rent Supplement Program, as I mentioned, to help supplement the living costs that are associated with staying in your

own unit, or a market unit, and that's something I would encourage.

We're here to help, as a government, whether it's through income assistance, through the programs we have at Housing, or any other programs that we have initiated or developed during the life of this government. We will continue to do that. It was an option, and I'm just throwing options out there in terms of anybody who is listening who might need a little bit of extra help, and that is what this government is here to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.