

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 391-18(3):
YELLOWKNIFE SOBERING CENTRE AND DAY SHELTER**

October 16, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. My statement applauded the way we have upped our game with the new day shelter and sobering centre, increasing the delivery of harm reduction and extending the hand of treatment and support. First, we'll need to see how this new setup is working out, and adjust delivery if needed. How does the Minister plan to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this new program delivery model? Mahsi.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for her statement. I think the opening of the sobering centre and day shelter was an important day in Yellowknife, an important day for the downtown core. I thank her and all the residents of Yellowknife for their support on this. I know there are some challenges, and we are certainly focused on safety of both our clients, our staff, as well as residents of the community, so we continue to evolve.

There are a number of different ways we hope to get some information, Mr. Speaker. We have put in place a number, a telephone number that residents in the neighbourhood could call to express their concern so that we can hear from our neighbours and modify the program, modify delivery to ensure that we are maintaining that safety that we're talking about.

We also have a contract with the NWT Disabilities Council. We've asked them to maintain some tracking of the individuals who are attending, how often, what kind of usage we're getting. We also have Health and Social Services staff going in there to utilize the front room for some of the reach-out to some of the clients who are in there, and we're putting in some evaluation mechanisms to monitor whether or not that is actually providing value in the services that the people are expecting and needing.

Outside of the evaluation, we are also working with other providers around town, like the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation, who is using some of the program space in that facility to provide different types of programs on a rotating basis to meet the needs of some of our clients. We will continue to monitor what is happening in that building, and I look forward to having more discussions with the Member and Members about this particular facility and how it is evolving and working, or not working, as time goes on.

MS. GREEN: Thanks to the Minister for that answer. I think that monitoring and evaluation is very important to service delivery. I think that there are a number of jurisdictions watching this sobering centre to see what, in fact, we are able to accomplish here. I understand that the resolution of addictions is a difficult thing to measure, but I hope the Minister will do his best.

Since the opening of the new facility, I have received calls from concerned neighbours

immediately adjacent to the new day shelter, and I think one of the things they would help is to increase coordination with the street outreach program to more proactively move people in distress off the street and into the sobering centre. Can the Minister say where we are on this suggestion?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, as I've previously indicated, safety is a primary concern for us as we work to deliver the services through this sobering centre day shelter. It's safety for our staff, safety for the residents, the client, but also safety for the neighbours who live or work immediately adjacent. We have put in the telephone number. We have shared it with neighbours, and we have asked them to please use the number. We need to hear their experiences. We need to learn from their experiences in order to improve what is happening around that facility.

With respect to street outreach, there is the Safe Ride Program who have done a significant amount of work, and I believe they have also been working with some of the individuals who utilize that facility to do more cleaning and other things around the facility so that bottles that are discarded are picked up more often.

Our challenge, obviously, is people who are using the facility. It's on a voluntary basis. People are participating in these programs. It's on a voluntary basis. I think there's been really great uptake, and I really applaud the NGOs who have been championing this, leading this, but there are some challenges. We can't mandate those activities at this point, but we would like to be supportive as much as possible.

MS. GREEN: The Minister touched on a complaint that I have had often, which has to do with the increased amount of litter surrounding the centre. To deal with this, I've suggested a more focused application of the Common Ground Litter Pick-Up Program, although I've heard that the money for this is sunsetting. Can the Minister say whether support has or could be given to extend this program, or whether there is another idea for picking up litter downtown?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Unfortunately, I don't know where we are in the financial situation with respect to that program. I believe that program is being run by an NGO, and it has been a very valuable program. We did have an opportunity to meet with some of the Member's constituents early on, and they talked about how much cleaner the area out in front of Northern Heights had been over the last year that this program was under way.

I will certainly look at it, Mr. Speaker. I think the program has value. I don't want to, obviously, step on another funder's toes, but if there is an opportunity to work together, I would certainly be happy to explore it.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Finally, as I noted in my statement, harm reduction is the motivating philosophy of the creation of this centre, and to increase services for people who are homeless and/or addicted. In the past, we've talked about the possibility of a managed alcohol program. I'm wondering if the Minister can comment on where this proposal stands? Will we see it in the life of this Assembly? Mahsi.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: I've said it in the House before, and I'll say it again: I am committed to having the Department of Health and Social Services explore the possibility of implementing a managed alcohol program here in Yellowknife as a pilot or trial a year after the sobering centre, day shelter, has been opened. I'm still committed to that. I still think that's incredibly important. We have seen that the managed alcohol program does work in other jurisdictions. I had an opportunity to visit a managed alcohol program in Ottawa which is getting some really great results.

The challenge that I'm now faced with, and we'll certainly be looking for ways to remedy this, is: the sobering centre day shelter is not a residence. Many of the managed alcohol programs are residential programs, so we are going to have to explore how to do that. I've committed to doing that a year after the sobering centre opened, so we have some opportunity to learn about it, the clients, what they're looking for, what supports they would like to see; but I do believe there's definitely value in this initiative. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.