

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

LEARNING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES DURING CHILDHOOD

February 26, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to mark Indigenous Languages Month by speaking about the importance and benefits of learning an Indigenous language during childhood.

We all know that the first language we learn has an enormous influence on establishing our bedrock cultural identity. Socially, emotionally, and intellectually, we embark on the world through the perspective of the language we first speak with our families. Children starting out in the world of formal schooling who have a strong grounding in an Indigenous language will also have a leg up to academic achievement. Once they have a strong first language, children can learn to speak another language easily. In fact, they can learn several languages at once.

Mr. Speaker, let's consider how to help children get this extra boost of language and identity. The NWT Literacy Council provides some tips. First, children need to hear the language. Each language has different sounds, and children need to hear those sounds in order to learn them. Children copy what they hear and see. If they see and hear people talking the language, they'll do the same. They'll do this by playing, and they play and learn at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that children often have a silent period. That is the time they are listening to the sounds and getting ready to speak. They will speak the language when they feel comfortable, not to worry about the time it takes to get started.

Just like adults, children make mistakes. This is a natural part of learning a language. Sometimes, it is difficult for children to make certain sounds because their mouth, tongue, throat, and lungs are still developing.

Anyone who has read to children knows they often want to hear the same story over and over again. That is because they learn by repeating things. They also love rhymes and songs, which use a different part of the brain than talking. Children often learn the words to songs faster than everyday speech.

Most of all and best of it, it just takes time to learn a language, and those are some of the most precious times, when parents and children grow together. Indigenous Languages Month is really a family month with happy times of singing, playing, reading, and loving together with a focus on language. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker