

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 745-18(3): YELLOWKNIFE ADULT DAY PROGRAM

May 28, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Minister of Health and Social Services talking about seniors' month starting in just a couple of days. Although the department provides many valuable services to seniors, there is a gap here in Yellowknife because there is no adult day program. It closed about two and a half years ago, and I ask each session what's happening with it. So, with that, I wonder if the Minister could give us an update on the status of the adult day program for Yellowknife? Thank you.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member's continued commitment and dedication to this particular program and the important work that it has done in the past and the important work that we need to continue to do. I did have an opportunity to meet with the Member earlier in May, where we had an opportunity to discuss the current status. Last session, I indicated that I would direct the department to move quickly to put in a day program. They did proceed with that work, but then they came back to me after they had an opportunity to talk to the other stakeholders, and the stakeholders raised a good point, that, before we design a program, we should really talk to the clients who are utilizing the program to make sure that the program we make actually suits their needs. It's been great that Members in this House, myself included, have been talking about how important it is, but we actually hadn't had that conversation, so I withdrew from aggressively pushing it to changing the direction slightly and asking the authority and the department to work with a steering committee that has been established to reach out to the residents in Yellowknife to find out exactly what they want so that what we design meets their needs. That work is currently under way. They are reaching out to seniors throughout the community to figure out what exactly they would like an adult day program to look like. We are hoping to have all that work done and the program designed by the fall of this year.

MS. GREEN: If I understand this correctly, it was the stakeholders who told the Minister to put the brakes on this while he did an assessment of needs. Do I have that correctly?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: No, that is not what I said. I said the stakeholders indicated that it would be valuable to do that work, that it would be important to actually hear what the residents say as opposed to us in this Chamber assuming we actually know without talking to the clients or to the residents. At that time, I realized that it's important that we get their voice, we get their input, we design programs to meet the needs of people as opposed to meeting the needs of the individuals in this House, and I directed them to take that new direction at that time.

MS. GREEN: The thing that I find most difficult to understand is, two and a half years after the day program closed, the Minister is now looking at an assessment of what the needs are. This, to me, does not indicate real priority to address this area. Why has it

taken so long to get to the point of assessing needs?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member might want to go back and review Hansard for the last two and a half years. She has certainly brought this up a number of times, and it is a priority. The Member should not be blind to the fact that, based on her recommendations, her encouragement in this House, we did go for an RFP; we had no applicants. We went out for another RFP; we had no applicants. We reached out to some stakeholders; there was some indication of a desire to work together. We were going through that process when, in October or January, February of this year, the Member said we really need to make progress. I made a commitment to actually move it forward with a program at that time. At that time, when we started to move out with the program, the stakeholders said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. We really need to do this assessment." I respect what our stakeholders are telling us, and I made the direction to the department at that time to reach out to users, not just stakeholders, and get that work done, which is what we are doing. We will have it done in the fall.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. This is a botch. This assessment should have been done before the RFP went out. On what basis was the RFP issued in the first place, if not to describe the needs that the bidder was supposed to work on? I fail to understand how doing an assessment at this point is the next logical step. It should have been done years ago. Now, the Minister is saying to us not only will it be done now, the whole program will be implemented and designed within the next four months. Mr. Speaker, I have been here long enough to think that that is unlikely. What confidence can the Minister give us that that will happen? Thank you.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member has been involved in this for a while. There was a report done after the original program shut down. I have heard the Member in this House say that we need to duplicate that program with a few amendments that were identified in that report. That is what we moved for in the RFP. That is what the Member and others encouraged me to do. I did as the Member suggested. It didn't prove to have any value because nobody applied on the RFP. We went to some stakeholders and got a few amendments on how we thought people wanted this to go, once again potential proponents. It also bore no fruit. Then we went to other stakeholders who hadn't expressed interest, and we started to get their input. This is based on the wishes of the Member, who has continually raised this issue. We have done what the Member has asked us to do, and we will continue to make sure that this program is effective.

On the last round, I said, "We are going to move. We are going to design something." At that point, the stakeholders, our partners, the people who want to be part of the solution said, "Before we do that, we should really talk to our clients to figure out exactly what it is they want as opposed to what has been delivered in the past, which did not work," which was in the RFP which was built on a report that was prepared based on what had previously been done, which did involve some input from stakeholders. The Member obviously appears to be upset that we are not making progress. We have been responsive to the Member. I am as frustrated as she is that it is not done, but the reality is, if we are going to do it, we need to do it right, and we are getting it done, Mr. Speaker.