

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
STATE OF DOWNTOWN YELLOWKNIFE

August 12, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I live downtown in my constituency. That is my choice and my pleasure, and there are many advantages to doing so, but it is not always easy. I pick up beer cans and liquor bottles almost daily, I have helped clean up after someone senselessly smashed a car window, and I assisted a man injured in a fight, and that is just in the last six months.

Despite these issues, I think that life downtown is better than it was four years ago, and here is why.

The previous mayor of Yellowknife created a working group to respond to the needs of people on the street; people who may be intoxicated or have mental health issues or may simply be homeless. The idea was to take the pressure off the RCMP, first responders, and the hospital, all of whom use substantial resources to meet the needs of people on the street. The city's plan was developed to provide services that recognize and respond to the complex needs of this population. This government has enabled that work with money, staff, and expertise, and I have been a leading supporter all along.

Mr. Speaker, the Street Outreach Program has been a huge success. Staff respond to public calls for assistance that might involve taking someone home, to assess services, or to any other place that they might want to go. Most importantly, the staff deliver clients to the sobering centre so that they can sleep off intoxication in a safe environment.

The sobering centre is the second major improvement in services downtown, now located in a space renovated for the purpose, with trained medical personnel on-site. Neighbours have been vocal about the need for a good neighbour agreement to protect their interests. I am hopeful that negotiations will soon produce an agreement that meets everyone's needs.

The sad fact is that this group of clients isn't welcome anywhere else, because their intoxication usually means trouble, but having this service available is better for everyone than returning to the time when drinkers passed out anywhere and everywhere and died of exposure.

Mr. Speaker, there is more work to do.

The fact is that alcohol is doing us more harm than good. It is costing the healthcare system tens of millions of dollars, it is robbing people of productive and happy lives, and it causes no end of trouble. The next step is to respond to alcohol as the root cause of many of the issues downtown with an action plan. This is a priority job for the next Assembly, in partnership with the city, businesses, and anyone else who wants to help. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.