

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

HOUSING FIRST AND HOMELESSNESS IN YELLOWKNIFE

August 19, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. When I campaigned for this position in 2015, residents of Yellowknife Centre identified homelessness as one of their priority issues. That was the year when the city calculated homelessness had increased 14 percent in 12 months. People were sleeping in bank foyers and stairwells and in tents and cars. That spring, a 43-year-old man froze to death in an alleyway downtown. His death galvanized the city to respond to the expanding population of homeless people.

In my first statement in this House, I talked about how a Housing First program could help by providing housing as a harm-reduction tool for people who are chronically homeless. Residents are supported by staff, who help them access services and mentor them to become stable tenants. The Yellowknife Women's Society took on Housing First with federal and territorial funds. They quickly ramped up the program to accept 20 clients. This program still only has funding for 20 clients, although program staff estimate there are 170, that is right 170, people on the waiting list who qualify for this service. This is a successful program that requires more investment.

Mr. Speaker, in the meantime, the territorial government has acknowledged the need for transitional housing. There are eight semi-independent units at the Yellowknife Women's Society, and more will be built by the end of the year with help of industry. The SideDoor is offering a Housing First program for youth up to 25 years old, and YWCA NWT continues to offer transitional housing for families, despite the loss of the Rockhill Apartments.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all of the good work being done to address homelessness in Yellowknife, and I also appreciate the Northern Pathways to Housing units that have opened in Fort Simpson, Aklavik, and Behchoko to assist homeless people in those communities. Some people may choose to return to their home communities if housing is available.

I think that homelessness is always going to be a problem in Yellowknife. The city is a magnet for people across the NWT because of the services it offers. I acknowledge that there is more accommodation available for homeless people than there was four years ago, but the waiting lists for non-profit housing together number in the hundreds of people. The 19th Assembly will have the important task of allocating more funding for this proven solution. Mahsi.