

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE

February 12, 2020

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to revive a discussion started in the 14th Assembly about creating an office of the child and youth advocate for the Northwest Territories. Children and youth need our special attention and support, particularly when they are being cared for by people other than their immediate families. Since the NWT started discussing this issue in 2003, Yukon has created an advocate office, and so has Nunavut. In fact, we are now one of only two jurisdictions in Canada without an office dedicated to protecting the rights of children on both an individual and systemic basis, as well as providing public awareness about those rights.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon has had a child and youth advocate office since 2010. The mission of the advocate is to provide services to children and youth up to 18 years of age, by protecting and asserting their rights and ensuring their voices are heard in a safe and supportive way. The office advocates for children who are receiving or who are eligible to receive government services, including help with mental health and addictions, education, and justice. The advocate is also involved in all aspects of child and family services. A total of 154 children accessed services in Yukon in 2018.

In Nunavut, the representative for children and youth was appointed in 2014. The office supports young Nunavummiut youth by giving voice to their concerns and ensuring that the government protects and advances their rights and interests. An elders' council helps guide the work. In their last annual report, the office reported opening 76 files.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the NWT to offer the same service to children and youth here. First, there is a big population of children accessing government services, an average of 1,000 children per year in each of the last 10 years. Second, the work of the Office of the Auditor General revealed that health authorities have not maintained regular contact with many of the children they have removed from homes and placed in foster care or other places. We know that contact with children and youth out of territory was also lacking. This is obviously a very vulnerable group, ranging in age from six months to 18 years, who have rights, including the right to be heard and to be treated fairly. The child advocate can provide the linkage between different players in the child's life to further his or her interests. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. GREEN: It's time for the GNWT to provide better services to children and youth. Creating a child and youth advocate is the place to start. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.