

MEMBER STATEMENT – JULIE GREEN MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
YELLOWKNIFE DAY SHELTER POLICY

DECEMBER 12, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I live downtown in my constituency, and the operation of the combined day shelter and sobering centre is a focus for many of my constituents and, indeed, for Yellowknifers in general. I am committed to making downtown a safer place for everyone to be.

I have spoken in this House about the gains made downtown by having both GNWT and the City of Yellowknife invest in programs for people who are intoxicated and/or homeless. These programs have produced good outcomes for clients, including keeping them safe and connecting them to housing and treatment services, but, as a recently completed evaluation shows, the day shelter's mandate is unclear.

Mr. Speaker, the operator of the combined centre, along the territorial health authority, has attempted to answer this question by banning people with homes from the day shelter. This change was poorly communicated, with a sign on the door a couple of days before the new rule was to come into force last month.

Clients and other service providers responded negatively to what they perceived as a surprise change, and one that may be dangerous to clients, especially in the winter. In the latest attempt to get the messaging right, the operator paid for two fullpage ads in the newspaper to make its case.

Mr. Speaker, there are some simple lessons to learn here. The first is to share and discuss the evaluation findings and proposed changes with other service providers. I am unclear of why that didn't happen, but it obviously should have.

Second, service providers need some kind of forum to discuss services for clients because, in many cases, there is an overlapping client group who access a number of different agencies. Other communities have interagency committees. Why doesn't Yellowknife? Is this work that the Health and Social Services authority could facilitate?

I have met people at the day shelter who go there to socialize, to take a break from escalating violence at home, or to get something to eat. I am unclear how these needs are going to be met now. Having made this change at the day shelter, the department needs to come up with a plan along with the new interagency committee about how to meet the complex needs of people who do have housing.

Mr. Speaker, this change comes at a time when the weather is a serious risk to those without homes. I appreciate they can go to the day shelter for warmth and safety. Now, we have to turn our attention to the population who are no longer welcome there. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker