



NWT SPCA
867-920-7722
nwtspcayk@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 5, 2021

Response to MLA Frieda Martselos' Statement

The Board of Directors of the NWT SPCA was distressed to learn of the comments made by MLA Frieda Martselos in session on March 3, 2021. We sincerely regret that Ms. Martselos had an experience at our shelter that made her feel that she was experiencing racism from within our organization.

We certainly take these concerns seriously, and we do not wish to minimize Ms. Martselos's lived experience or feelings in any way; however, following an investigation of the events that occurred on February 1, 2021, we can say that while we acknowledge that Ms. Martselos experienced a negative interaction with a member of the SPCA on that day, we do not believe that racism was a factor in the incident, nor do we believe that is it an issue within our organization.

The NWT SPCA works hard to ensure that our organization is an inclusive and safe environment for all public and staff. As an organization, we do not condone any form of racism or tolerate any kind of discriminatory behaviour amongst our Board, staff, volunteers, or anyone else who enters our shelter. We have a zero tolerance policy for any form of discrimination, whether it be based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or anything else.

We acknowledge that a staff, volunteer or Board Member was likely curt, and possibly irritated, when they spoke briefly to Ms. Martselos on that day, and told her that the puppy she was interested in was already spoken for and not available for adoption.

There are specific rules, policies and procedures in place at our shelter that are necessary for its effective operations, and for the safety of everyone involved, including our staff, volunteers, members of the public, and the animals themselves. These rules include set, and posted, hours when the shelter is open to the public.

There were no public hours on the day that Ms. Martselos attended at the shelter, and she attended without an appointment. She should not have been invited in by the staff members on

duty that day; she should have been encouraged to come back during public hours, or make an appointment with our foster and adoption specialist. We regret that this policy was not followed by our staff.

The management who interacted with Ms. Martselos was understandably irritated to arrive at the shelter, to find all of the staff on duty gathered, attending to an unscheduled visitor, holding an unvaccinated puppy, with a view to adoption.

Puppies fresh into our shelter require vetting and vaccinations before being exposed to other animals in the shelter or to members of the public. Shelter staff are aware of the need to minimize the risk of potential spread of parvo or other deadly diseases. Shelter staff are also not responsible for providing shelter tours, introducing the public to potential adoptable animals, or being involved in the fostering/adoption program at all. The staff in question were acting outside the scope of their employment, taking time from their scheduled and mandated duties, and were not following requisite NWT SPCA protocols and procedures. This will be addressed with the staff members in question.

On February 1, 2021, our Management was taken by surprise, and was concerned about the situation at the Shelter that she arrived to witness; as a result, she was understandably preoccupied, and she regrets that Ms. Martselos found her to be abrupt, unfriendly, or rude. The NWT SPCA wants to assure Ms. Martselos that while this response was unacceptable, it certainly had nothing to do with Ms. Martselos's Indigenous background, or any other reason having to do with Ms. Martselos personally. We apologize that on that day, we did not meet the standards for customer service to the public that we strive for.

As the Board it is our responsibility to ensure that all who work with us have the resources needed to ensure positive interactions with the public. As a board we take full responsibility for this unfortunate incident, and we will work towards improving future interactions with the public.

The NWT SPCA is run entirely by volunteers. Our Board of Directors is entirely composed of volunteers, and our President and our Vice President both spend hundreds of hours every month, unpaid, ensuring the safe and effective operation of our shelter, and carrying out our mission.

With the current pandemic, our safety protocols have been necessarily expanded, and the demand on both our staff and volunteers has increased. The stress level amongst staff, volunteers and Board Members is high.

The NWT SPCA has for some time been campaigning the GNWT to provide significant, reliable, annual funding to allow us to focus on improving our services to the residents of the NWT, and the animals we care for. Such funding could allow us to hire a full-time shelter manager or Executive Director to take over the full-time role currently being undertaken by our overworked and unpaid volunteers.

We thank Ms. Martselos for bringing this issue to the attention of the Legislative Assembly, and hope that shining a light on the extreme stress that our volunteers are operating under will encourage the Assembly to reconsider funding the important work that we do.

We also would like to extend the offer to Ms. Martselos, and any other interested persons, to attend at our shelter, during public hours, or by appointment, or attend one of our Board Meetings (by request), to discuss their experiences or concerns, and to learn about the work that we do, and the steps that we take to ensure that our organization is fair, welcoming and inclusive, and that we operate our shelter and all of our programs with this in mind.

For more information, please email us at nwtspcayk@gmail.com