

## ***Dawna Huff Profile***

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### ***Helping smooth journeys through grief***



Her bureaucratic job title is critical incident response specialist, but that doesn't begin to describe what WorkSafeBC employee Dawna Huff does and how it affects her.

“My job is assisting families of men and women who die or are badly hurt in the workplace — offering grief support, information, education and guidance through the incident investigation process.”

One of three WorkSafeBC employees in this sensitive role, Huff sees it as a day-to-day extension of the Day of Mourning that every April honours those who die earning a living.

They have worked with hundreds of families, says Huff, “remaining consistent contacts throughout their journeys with WorkSafeBC. Involvement with families can last one year or five years, depending on their situations.

“We keep the heart in our work, without compromising procedure, professionalism and legal requirements because WorkSafeBC wants its necessary technical processes to be human.

“I love what I do — going to very personal places with my clients. My days can be filled with emotion, meeting people in grief at the worst imaginable times, when their lives have crumbled.”

The work is often very affecting, she says. “Their grief can be so palpable that it touches me very deeply. I remember one client, a single mother who'd lost her 19-year-old son, her only child. That hit me because I'm a single mother with an only child.”

Huff's eighteen-year-old daughter, Chloe, has grown up watching her mother do this kind of work and knows its impact. “Some very heavy days,” says Huff, “I come home and need to be treated gently. Chloe understands, and I'm grateful for that.”

But overall, the job is fulfilling, and “I love it,” says Huff. “I've learned a great deal from my clients. Besides demonstrating the true meaning of patience, they have shown me so much.”

Among the key lessons she lists these:

- Everyone's experience of grief is unique, with varying levels of rage, helplessness and acceptance.
- Through their rage, helplessness and acceptance people can be incredibly gracious.
- Strength, resilience, openness and growth can spring forth from even the most devastated soul.
- Listening and honesty are the most valuable tools.

A big lesson, “a constant” for Huff, is this: “Families who lose loved ones on the job want to understand how it happened, why it happened and what’s going to be done to keep it from happening to other families.

“That’s what they truly want — from WorkSafeBC, from employers and from workers everywhere.”

Huff has also learned this from many of her clients: they often feel abandoned by their loved ones’ employers or co-workers.

“It’s crucial that families hear from you about their loss — personally. You may be torn apart, not wanting to face them, or hear their rage and anguish. But they need to know people on the job care.

“If no one reaches out, the message is that their loved one didn’t matter at all, and this can haunt the grieving. That would be wrong.”