

Linda Bessant wins 2018 David Bland Award

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Linda Bessant of Victoria, B.C. is the recipient of this 2018 David Bland Award.

"I am humbled by the award," said Bessant, but she is sobered by the tragic workplace accident that killed HSA member David Bland. "The award is given out unfortunately because someone lost their life, and as appreciative as I am to receive the award, I realize the tragedy that had to occur for this award to be handed out in the first place," said Bessant.

Accidents, however, can also be a source of inspiration, and Bessant's case is no exception. It was her own experience with an injury that motivated her to become more involved in occupational health and safety (OH&S).

"It started quite a few years ago when I suffered a workplace injury. It was a little confusing to me, what I needed to do," she recounted. "It really motivated me to not only educate myself but educate the people around me."

Bessant works as a children's support worker at the Victoria Women's Transition House Society, and has served in the union as an OH&S steward for more than 10 years. She is a longstanding Joint OH&S (JOSH) committee member.

Within her activism, there is no single accomplishment that stands out. Instead, she said the work of an OH&S

representative involves a constant effort to make sure that policies put into place are practiced.

“There’s no one big ‘aha’ moment. Just daily, never-ending reminders,” she said. For Bessant, the role is about “standing up for what’s right.”

“You may not see huge changes but if people realize that you’re not going to give up, that you’ll continue with issues until they are resolved, that puts a little bit more value on your role as a JOSH member.”

“Never give up,” she advised fellow OH&S stewards.

Bessant received her award on April 28, the National Day of Mourning for workers seriously injured or killed on the job. April 28 not only honours those who have lost their lives to workplace injury, it also proclaims a commitment to strengthen workplace health and safety policy and legislation.

That day, Bessant attended the Vancouver Day of Mourning at Jack Poole Plaza with fellow HSA convention delegates. “They may have numbers about fatalities but these are the lives of people,” said Bessant, recounting the speeches of a young man who lost his arm and a mother who lost her son to workplace accidents.

“So what can we do to ensure that this doesn’t happen in our workplace?” asked Bessant. “It’s a right for people to go to their work, work in a safe place, and come home again at the end of the day, safely.”

Bessant is engaged in several initiatives to strengthen the safety of her workplace. She is currently working on a risk assessment tool for staff who are working alone.

“We need to be a bit more mindful. For the staff working by themselves, I don’t think there is enough accountability for their safety.”

After an ongoing development process, the tool is now being finalized. “This is just an extra tool. We do have a risk assessment policy, a general one, but now we are fine-combing it so that there are things we can pick out from incidents,” she said.

Bessant is frequently examining her workplace’s various safety measures. “I always try to ensure we have safety precautions. People wearing their panic buttons, ensuring that the buzzer system is working, when needed,” listed Bessant.

As a member of the JOSH committee, Bessant works to keep the committee accountable, ensuring that all employer representatives realize the importance of documenting incidents, and that reports are shared among committee members in a timely manner.

“I will continue to raise the issues. I will celebrate all our victories and continue to strive for a safe and healthy workplace for all.”

[The June 2018 issue of The Report Magazine can be found in full here.](#)

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