



**As a support worker** at a homeless shelter, I work to provide a safe, respectful space for women in our community. I use compassion and counselling skills, and try to form trusting and reciprocal relationships to help women get back on their feet.

I work at Sandy Merriman house, a 25 bed emergency shelter for homeless women operated by Victoria Cool Aid Society.

We work with women from all walks of life: the single mother who can't afford child care on minimum wage; the grandmother whose children can't afford to support her; the young woman fleeing abuse in her parents' home; the cancer patient who spent her savings on chemo meds and can't afford rent; the sex trade worker recovering from a bad date; the developmentally-delayed woman struggling to live on her own in the world.

Last year, one of my clients came into the office about a week before she passed away. She asked to speak to me privately so we went outside, lit up our smokes and just sat in silence for a while. Eventually I asked her what she wanted to chat about. She pulled out a single rose and handed it to me. When I asked her what the occasion was she replied she wanted me to take the flower home, dry it, press it and keep it safe in a photo album somewhere. She said I and the other workers at SMH were the only family she really had and when she died she wanted me to have something to remember her by. She told me it wasn't so much death that she feared, but no one remembering she had even existed.

I will always remember that she existed.

I and my co-workers are there for women when they have nobody else to turn to, and we love our jobs.

*Shannon Beckett is member of the BCGEU.*

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