

Karoline perseveres to achieve her career vision

By Katrina Geenevasen, Kingston This Week
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Karoline Bourdeau and her dog Jacquie are a perfect team. Karoline is the founder of Insightful Mediation, a service that provides two parties the option to talk through problems and come to a mutual agreement.

Born with a vision impairment, Karoline Bourdeau wasn't welcome or accepted at any schools where she lived in Dubai. She spent the first 13 years of her life at home, watching others get an education.

Eager to keep up, Bourdeau would borrow her peers' books. Eventually, she learned how to read and write at home with the help of her father.

When her family immigrated to Montreal when Bourdeau was a teenager, she wanted homework, eager to catch up as much as she could.

She completed elementary school within two years, and her high school education in three years. She went on to receive an education from Queen's University and certification from the Mediation Centre of Southeastern Ontario.

It seems all of her hard work has paid off.

This past June, Bordeau, now 38 years old, successfully launched her own business in Kingston.

"It feels amazing and so liberating," said Bordeau of her ability to begin her own business. "I wanted the ability to make decisions for myself. I wanted to make decisions about when I worked, how I worked and how much I worked, and I wanted to be able to explore different things in my own time."

Aptly named Insightful Mediation, Bordeau's business model focuses on strong listening skills, which Bordeau has cultivated her entire life, to solve conflicts big and small.

"I've spent a lot of time developing my sense of hearing and I think that helps a lot," said Bordeau. "I also think that it has made me more outgoing in some ways, in that I know that I have to work twice as hard as most people because I have to listen to everything as opposed to just looking at it."

It was her desire to help others through mediation that ultimately got her on her own two feet as a businesswoman.

She spent some time practising at a family law firm, which she quickly decided was not for her.

She then worked with a real estate and criminal law firm. While she enjoyed what she was doing, it "just didn't feel right."

"I kept on wondering what it was that would feel good, so I decided to explore careers and what I wanted to do for myself, and what was appropriate for me, and it just so happened that mediation was it," said Bordeau with a smile on her face.

Her new career allows her to utilize all the skills she developed while in school.

"It uses a lot of social skills and a lot of legal skills as well, and you can help people resolve their issues in one day as opposed to months or years in a court system."

Bordeau employs a facilitative approach to mediation, following a model that believes constructive dialogue and creating space for people to think are the keys to resolving conflict. This model helps Bordeau's clients to preserve relationships and arrive at productive agreements.

With her guide dog Jacque by her side, Bordeau is able to navigate the legal system with ease. A friendly Labrador Retriever, Jacque acts as more than Bordeau's eyes.

"He just opens things up for communications," said Bordeau. "People want to know about him, so we always get talking to different people, and I think that helps."

He also helps to break down barriers between people that are involved in the mediation, said Bordeau.

For both Bordeau and Jacque, mediation is the practical way to go.

"Nobody wants to be walking around trying to resolve issues for years and years when they could sit down and come up with a solution for them and be creative about it and resolve it in a couple of days," said Bordeau.

While Bordeau remains optimistic about her future in mediation, there are some hurdles she needs to sort through before she can settle into a stable routine.

Currently, she is trying to find accounting software that she can easily navigate with her vision impairment.

She also needs to ensure her clients learn to send her their information in advance so she can scan them and be prepared before meetings. Unlike others, she can't visually review a page and be ready.

"That's a big disadvantage," said Bordeau. "But, it's just a challenge and you go past it."

And to her, the hurdles are worth the end result.

"I love seeing people in a room that don't even want to look at each other, but by the end of the day, they are chatting and laughing and having a more positive attitude," said Bordeau. "It's an amazing feeling because I just know that I have made some difference in somebody's life."

For more information on Insightful Mediation or to inquire about Bordeau's services, visit www.insightfulmediation.ca or call Bordeau at 613-767-6410.

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