

"A career, four boys, and lupus"

By Isabelle Légaré, *Le Nouvelliste*
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Kim Dumais is the new Deputy General Manager in Shawinigan. In its announcement, the City took care to highlight the fact that she is the first woman to hold this position. (Stéphane Lessard/Le Nouvelliste)

COLUMN / Nothing seems out of place from the outside. To see her juggling her new professional duties and her family responsibilities, including being a hockey mom to her four boys, it's clear: Kim Dumais has energy to spare. However, it's not always as straightforward as it seems. There are days when, without warning, lupus imposes its own agenda on her.

"I'm used to moving quickly!" she apologized, smiling, when my colleague suggested photographing her walking down a hallway in the Shawinigan City Hall. The 40-year-old woman is like a fish in water in this building, where she laid all her cards on the table before accepting the key position she has just been assigned.

"Are you aware that I have lupus and four children?"

Her boys have always been her priority and will remain so, regardless of the workload on her desk.

"I never miss a hockey game, none of their shows. I am first and foremost a mom."

A mother who, in 2016, learned that an autoimmune disease would now be part of her life with all that it implies, both for her and for her loved ones.



Among all the roles she holds, Kim Dumais defines herself first and foremost as a mom. (Stéphane Lessard/Le Nouvelliste)

Since 2020, Kim Dumais has been the Director of Human Resources, and she has just been appointed Deputy General Manager, making her the first woman to be entrusted with this mandate at the City of Shawinigan.

Originally from Dolbeau-Mistassini in the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region, Kim Dumais has been living in Bécancour for about twenty years. With a degree in industrial relations, she was an entrepreneur before taking on the leadership role in Shawinigan, where this team player has unanimous support.

"We're shopping for a cottage," the Deputy General Manager tells me, finding time to pursue a master's degree in municipal management. She and her partner, Kevin Richard, have their eyes on the Sainte-Flore area to find a getaway that will allow them to balance work and family life dictated by the school calendar and the sports activities of Julien, 15, Samy, 13, Zach, 10, and Alex, 8.

"How do you manage it all?"

She's often asked this question.

Kim Dumais finds her strength in her boys, who charge ahead with her.

She knows she's being watched by them when she walks with difficulty due to leg pain, sometimes forcing her to cancel an outing to stay home and rest.

"Either I feel sorry for myself, or I show them that we can make something out of an event that happens to us in life. We live with the disease, but we don't let it control us."

— Kim Dumais

The diagnosis of lupus came in December 2016.

"I couldn't turn my head anymore. I had significant stiffness in my neck, fever, extreme fatigue, and joint pain."

At the hospital, they thought she had meningitis until a rheumatologist confirmed it was lupus, a chronic inflammatory disease that affects women more often.

Kim came home with a range of medications, without seeking further information about lupus. She had better things to do in her busy life.

"I am a strong woman. The disease can wait," she told herself.

In spring 2021, there was a relapse. Again affected by extreme fatigue and other symptoms, Kim also developed a "wolf mask" on her face, with red patches on her nose and cheeks. Her immune system was turning against her...

"If I have the flu, my antibodies wake up, but instead of attacking the virus, they can attack the heart, kidneys, lungs, skin, joints..." explains the woman, mentioning that lupus "flares" are interspersed with remissions.

Every week, Kim Dumais injects herself with medication. For now, it's going well, but lupus is unpredictable and manifests differently for each person, hence its nickname "the disease with a thousand faces."

"Where in the world can I go to meet the best researchers?" Kim asked her rheumatologist, and she replied, "You won't have to go far, they're in Quebec."

The woman has great hope in the team of specialists at the CHU de Québec. Determined to raise awareness about the disease, Kim founded the Lupus Quebec Foundation and launched a fundraising campaign for research.

"My lupus is a privilege," asserts the woman who, better than anyone, has understood the importance of making the most of each passing day.

At the Dumais-Richard household, having a fondue dinner on a Tuesday evening to simply celebrate a beautiful day is possible. The children ask for more, just as they are eager to fill out the wishlist with their mother for the year.

One of those wishes has just come true. Kim had a woman's face tattooed on her arm with a butterfly replacing one eye. One side of her now sees life with lupus.



Kim Dumais lives with lupus and this tattoo illustrates her resilience. (Courtesy)

"It's really beautiful! I bring magic and color into my life!" affirms the woman who is no stranger to adversity. Since 2014, the municipal manager has also been living with what she calls "a little Sword of Damocles"...

Kim Dumais learned she was pregnant with Zach at the same time she was told about a brain tumor. Located behind the pituitary gland, it cannot be removed. Too risky. Perhaps one day, if new surgical techniques allow it, but not now.

"I manage to forget about it... The kids call it the little rock," the woman smiles confidently. Kim receives close medical follow-up because of lupus. Until proven otherwise, the tumor is stable and non-cancerous.

So Kim keeps pushing forward, as she says, both in Shawinigan and with her family.

"I come to work because I want to make a difference. I deeply believe that I can contribute something to the City where I'm allowed to fulfill myself. I really think it's the disease that brings me that vision. I have nothing to lose."