



Contributed photo

Shannon Converse tutors a Darien student. Shannon and her husband Fred operate My Tutor and Me, used by many in New Canaan and surrounding towns.

## My Tutor and Me : Teaching Pays Off

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Wherever there's a child struggling in school, My Tutor and Me is there to help.

The two-year-old Darien-based company specializes in providing one-on-one home tutoring for students having trouble in nearly any subject.

Owned and run by Shannon and Fred Converse, My Tutor and Me currently employs over 100 tutors, most of which have master's degrees or are certified Connecticut or New York teachers. The company serves towns in Fairfield, New Haven and Westchester counties.

Fred Converse said a major difference that sets My Tutor and Me apart is its one-on-one nature, which the name suggests. Tutors address the differences in each student by tailoring specific lesson plans around each individual client.

"We offer a non-prescribed approach," he said. "There are no formulated tests, it's all individualized to each person."

Based upon the subject a client needs help with, the Converses select an appropriate tutor matching the client's needs, first discussing with parents the history of the problem as well as getting a good overall sense of personality. Shannon Converse said pairing a tutor and child that are both fond of baseball, for example, helps to establish a friendlier, enriching relationship between the two.

My Tutor and Me's tutors specialize in all the essential school subjects from kindergarten through grade 12, including advanced placement classes, and even provide for special education, language studies and web design. Tutors are also available to aid students going through transitions from middle school to high school, to improve study skills, prepare for standardized tests and supplement class work for those that feel unchallenged.

The first session with a tutor is always a "risk free" one, where the client and tutor can become acquainted and decide whether or not to continue together. Fred Converse said they almost never have a problem pairing people.

"We do all our homework up front," he said. "There's never really been a problem with that."

Hiring tutors and gaining clients is a primarily a word-of-mouth process. While My Tutor and Me has put classified ads in the newspaper on occasion and regular ads in parent magazines such as *Connecticut Parent*, they generally do not advertise. When looking for new tutors, the company has made contact with school guidance offices, which in turn leads to more students, parents and teachers becoming aware of the company. They also promoted themselves this past April to those attending the Fairfield County Teacher Recruitment Fair. They said on average they interview four or five applicants a month, with roughly 30 over this past summer.

They are currently in the process of hiring a salesperson (with a background in teaching as well) to make contacts with schools. They encourage people to check out their website, which they say has generated the most responses thanks to Internet searches.

For both Converses starting the company is something of an ideal occupation. Shannon Converse specializes in special education, motivated by her mother's Muscular Dystrophy. Having earned a Master's degree from New York City's Bank Street College and a bachelor's from the State University of New York in Oswego, N.Y., she is teacher-certified in elementary and special education. She also runs the learning center for special education students at Barlow Mountain

Elementary in Ridgefield.

Fred Converse comes from a different angle. Before My Tutor and Me, he worked for Viacom in New York City, followed by a stint at a post-9/11-defunct Internet company. He holds a degree in psychology from the former Windham College in Vermont, which has become Landmark College, a school for special education students.

They feel their backgrounds were the perfect mix for starting the company.

"It's an ideal fit for a business," Shannon Converse said. "We get to tie in the business background with providing a service for people."

My Tutor and Me seems to have left a good mark on the community. Their website has a slew of praises from parents that have noticed major improvement from their children. One New Canaan parent, Ellie Badanes, said she has used My Tutor and Me tutors for her three children, and was pleased to see a tutor available for AP calculus for her high school senior last year. She said tutors also helped her then 8th grader improve in reading comprehension and prepare for the transition into high school.

"We had a wonderful young teacher who was so upbeat and full of energy," she said. "They were able to find people so quickly, and it's hard enough to find an AP calculus tutor. It's a very nice service; I would recommend them to anyone."

The Converses said they would like to see some expansion in the company in the future. Shannon is a trained yoga instructor and Fred has a background in music, so they would like to see yoga, music and arts incorporated into the program. Shannon Converse said they may branching into New York City in a few years, but would be careful to maintain and not damage their personal approach.