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June 23, 2005

## Nurturing clever minds outside the classroom

Truckee tutoring duo offers special one-on-one sessions for local students

**Renée Shadforth**  
September 8, 2004

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Vicki Isacowitz and Katie Smith want to do more than fill their students' brains with knowledge.

The two founders of Clever Minds, a learning center in Truckee, try to reach their clients from a different angle.

"We feel we teach holistically; we teach the entire student," Isacowitz said while in between students in Clever Minds' new space behind Ace Hardware in Truckee.

Among other tactics - like setting goals and finding out the students' likes and dislikes in school - Isacowitz said they "just want to make the students feel comfortable. Some of them feel it's a punishment to come to tutoring."

Whether it's the atmosphere at Clever Minds or the need for academic tutors in Truckee, Smith and Isacowitz say their schedules are filling up fast for the young school year.

Clever Minds opened earlier this summer with a rented space in a portable at Sierra Mountain Middle School. They provided individual tutoring, small group instruction, workshops and enrichment reinforcement. Some of their clients need help with math and science, while others need help with organization and handwriting.

With the start of the school year they have moved to a more permanent space in Truckee and added to their offerings. There will be an SAT prep class and a homework assistance program for the fall.

The younger clients in kindergarten through fifth grade go to Smith, 28, who has her bachelor's degree in elementary education, a minor in learning disabilities and a master's degree in literacy education. She said many of her students so far are enrolled in special education.

The older students in sixth through 12th grade see Isacowitz, 30, who taught at Squaw Valley Academy and Prosser Creek Charter School.

She said Clever Minds' holistic approach to tutoring is especially useful with teenagers.

"A lot of times there are things going on in their lives, and it's affecting their academics," Isacowitz said.

Aside from making their students more at ease with learning, Isacowitz and Smith say a supplement to traditional education is becoming more imperative because of the changing climate in public schools.

"With what's going on with education today, and people putting greater emphasis on getting into college and test scores, parents are playing a more active role in their child's education," Isacowitz said.

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Some children, Smith said, need the one-on-one environment tutoring provides just to survive in today's schools.

"It helps students who need individualized attention," Smith said. "Unfortunately what our system has come to - with 30-plus students in a class - teachers try very hard, but there's only so much they can do."

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