

## Mom finds a way to be home with son and fulfill herself

*New institute offers after-school programs, tutoring, summer camps*

*By Christine Walsh*

SHREWSBURY, Mass. - Gauri Chandna didn't like math much until she was in the 10th grade and went to a private tutor.

The tutor had a way of teaching that made Chandna fall in love with - and excel in - the subject.

Now, Chandna is hoping to do the same for students who attend Aadhaarshila, her newly founded institute that offers tutoring, after-school programs and summer academic camps.



**Students are hard at work in the classroom of Gauri Chandna's Aadhaarshila educational institute in Shrewsbury, Mass.**

Translated from Sanskrit, Aadhaarshila means "the foundation stone." Chandna's theory is that a good understanding of each subject is the foundation that builds a strong base to succeed on tests and earn good grades.

Aadhaarshila strives to achieve this through enthusiastic, personalized teaching that generates qualities that stay with a student for life.

"I feel it's my responsibility to make my children feel good about what they're doing," says Chandna, 30. "I believe in it so strongly because of my experience. It so depends on the teacher. If a child understands the subject and has fun doing it ... that's the road to accomplishment."

Chandna launched Aadhaarshila last summer after deciding to quit her job as a project manager for a Cambridge publishing company. Her family was concerned that she had chosen to stay at home with her 3-year-old son; it was in her nature to be out interacting with people.

She assured her husband and parents that she would do something productive. Thoughts of venturing into retail, food, imports and exports crossed her mind, until she considered the reason she was in this predicament: her son, Ansh.

"I started to think of other children, whose parents are out working," she said. "Not all of them are as lucky as me and can choose to stay home. A lot of parents are working because they have no choice. Their kids don't get personal attention."

Chandna said she decided against opening a daycare - not intellectually stimulating enough. She landed on tutoring after talking to a friend with a son in the eighth grade. He became her first student.

The move made sense. Though Chandna's degree is in engineering, both her parents are teachers and she herself had experience in training workers. "I felt like I was putting all those pieces together and it fit well," said Chandna, who grew up in India. Chandna began tutoring her friend's son in algebra during her last week of work at the publishing company. "I still remember my first day," she said. "I was as nervous as him, probably. I hadn't done math in a long time. For every two hours we had, I would study for five hours."

Soon, the tutoring sessions became fun for Chandna. The boy's sister, who needed help with pre-calculus before heading to college, became her second student.

By the time the school year started, word of mouth started generating more and more business for Aadhaarshila. Eventually, she converted part of her house into classroom space and expanded her offerings beyond tutoring. She currently has about six employees and an enrollment of 23.

Aadhaarshila's programs include after-school learning sessions for elementary, middle and high school students; year-round accelerated learning for gifted and talented students; Vedic math courses that teach ancient Indian calculation techniques; and corporate communication skills. This summer, students have been coming to Chandna's house for a five-day-a-week camp. High-school students are there in the mornings, when they study for the SATs or get a jumpstart on the math and science classes they'll be taking in the fall. Younger students spend the day in a variety of sessions, like Vedic math, modern math, science and English. They receive individualized study packets and personal assistance from teachers.

Neeta Shah's son Punit, set to enter his junior year at Westborough High School, attends the summer camp and has been going to Aadhaarshila since December. Already, she's seen results.

"Math is one of his hardest subjects, but because of Gauri's help he was able to keep up with it and he ended up with a very nice grade," Shah said, noting that Chandna helped fill in gaps in Punit's math skills rather than "teaching to the test."

"She taught him how to organize his studies and his projects," Shah said. "He's better able to plan his activities now." Chandna, for one, said Aadhaarshila has taught her about happiness.

"Students will say, 'Gauri auntie, you're so passionate about teaching,'" she said. "They all love coming here; they get a homey environment where they can relax and get work done. They enjoy being with their friends, as well as seeing the results."