

## NOT JUST ANOTHER HOME INSPECTION FIRM

## SUCCESS STORIES

## SUSAN CUMBERLAND

*Director, Academic Advantage*

“We try to plan our lives and careers but it doesn’t always end up the way we expect,” says Susan Cumberland, director of Academic Advantage Educational Services Inc. “Ten years ago I never would have imagined I’d own a large tutoring referral agency and franchise system with over 600 teachers and over 500 active clients per month. I love what I do.”

The idea for Academic Advantage, which helps students succeed and build confidence, began in 2002. “My husband and I adopted a baby from an orphanage in China; I was given 10 months of parental leave through EI. Then I found myself pregnant and gave birth right around the time I was supposed to return to teaching. I wasn’t eligible for maternity leave with my second daughter.”

After a friend who had just completed Douglas College’s self-employment pro-

gram (SEP) raved about it, Cumberland went to an information session and decided she loved the idea of receiving \$1,000 per month

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for a year. “A tutoring referral agency seemed like an easy gig and my education and experience fit perfectly,” she explains. “So I joined the program in the summer of 2002. My husband, a high-school teacher, looked after the babies during the summer, which was the SEP classroom component. I created a business plan during those classes.”

Cumberland says the

most useful part of the SEP process was creating a vision statement, which projected where her business would be in five years. “The business plan was like a manual on how to make that vision come true,” she recalls. “My business grew and I could see there was great potential. The SEP program was a great start.”

After completing the program, Cumberland hired her SEP adviser as a business coach to help fine-tune her operations. As revenue increased, she brought on a technical wizard to customize a database for her. In 2008, she employed Lane Snider of Global Leaders as her marketing coach, which further bumped up revenue.

“That’s when it dawned on me: I had created a tight system and a successful business model,” she says. “Franchising was the best way for me to grow the business and provide others

with a successful home-based business and flexible lifestyle in an industry that was booming.”

In 2010, Cumberland worked with Wayne Maillet of Franchise Specialists over an eight-month period. As a result, Academic Advantage now offers tutoring services throughout the Lower Mainland, Comox Valley and Campbell River, and in Victoria and other Island communities.

“I’m proud of what my team of experts and I have created,” she says. “I’m excited to share this successful business model with others. My vision is much bigger now than my vision back in 2002. I plan to award 100 franchises across Canada and the U.S. within the next five years.”

To young entrepreneurs, Cumberland offers this advice: “If you want a family and career, don’t let anyone

tell you that you can’t do both. Figure out what you want your life to look like and build a career and personal life the way you want it. Don’t let your job control you. Above all, take care of your health – it is the most precious gift you have.” ■

Learn more about Academic Advantage by visiting [www.schooliseasy.com](http://www.schooliseasy.com); email [info@schooliseasy.com](mailto:info@schooliseasy.com) or phone 604-439-1790.

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