

# The Connectors: Entrepreneurs link people with the services best suited to their needs

**Andrew A. Duffy**

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Four years ago Dahlia Miller wanted to find a math and Spanish tutor for her son.

Her options were thumbing blind through the phone book or tearing a number from a perforated ad on a bulletin board -- hardly the kind of stuff that instills confidence in the ability of a teacher to connect with a young learner.

There had to be a better -- and safer -- way. Miller had been an English-as-a-second-language program instructor and administrator and knew about people posing as tutors in order to sexually harass students.

Miller believes she's found the answer with Smart Tutor Referrals, which matches students with a database of tutors who have been screened to ensure compatibility.



CREDIT: John McKay, Times Colonist

Sarala Godine, left, Dahlia Miller take the guesswork out of finding health care and tutors.

Sarala Godine saw a similar opportunity in the health-care field. While working on her master's degree at a local coffee shop, Godine ran into a woman needing to find a means of dealing with arthritis and not knowing where to turn.

Godine, who has used alternative therapies for more than three decades, offered her expertise to help find a solution. And it hit her that there was clearly a market for someone who could connect the dots for people in need.

From that chance meeting, Options for Health was born, a go-between service that pairs clients looking for alternative health-care options with a database of local practitioners.

For both women, who have found a niche for themselves in the business world, it's been trial by fire as they cope with wearing the various hats of the small business owner -- accountant, receptionist, consultant, networker and marketer when not doing the job they started in the first place. But they seem to feed off the challenge, and the fact they believe they are doing some good along the way.

"It was a challenge, one I was excited to take on, but it certainly was a lot of learning at first," said Miller. "But I find the whole thing stimulating."

And because the business is about providing piece of mind when shopping for a tutor, she says it's rewarding work. She says there is no other way to be sure that the person working with your child knows what they are doing, is a good match and is safe.

Miller conducts interviews with her clients, establishing their goals, learning styles and how they like to work. She then cross-references the findings with a list of tutors she has interviewed, pairing teaching and personality styles to those of her clients who will pay between \$30-\$50 per hour (the fee split between tutor and business) depending on the experience and topic.

Godine equates running her business to writing her master's thesis.

"You start with an idea and you need to be open to how it can grow and take shape," she said. "You have to be able to let it flow and know where to take it and where not to take it.

"For me, I'm a natural connect-the-dots person, this was a natural thing," she said. "People want to take some control of their health, but it can be an expensive thing trying to find something that works for you."

Godine says her service cuts down on the amount you'll spend to find what works for you.

She spends between one and two hours with a client -- they pay \$50 an hour and \$85 for two for the consult -- determining their belief system, what they are looking for and what they are comfortable with.

Godine then matches those needs to a list of practitioners ranging from naturopath and acupuncturists to those who specialize in electro-crystal rebalancing and everything in between.

"I have spent at least an hour with all of them, and I know their specialties, what they cost, if they are touchy-feely and warm and fuzzy or spiritually focused or technicians," she said. "I am not a list. I am a resource and an educator."

Godine will also break down for a client exactly what each practice is, and questions they should ask each practitioner in order for them to maximize the effectiveness of any treatment.

She says a lot of people will offer advice on who to see -- everyone has a story of what's worked for them in the past -- but without detailed knowledge of the practices and who does them, you're just shooting in the dark.

Miller and Godine say they are simply turning on the lights.

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## ESSENTIAL MILLER

Born: Edmonton Raised: Langley

Age: 34

Family: Separated, son Malachite, 9

Education: B.A. from University of British Columbia and diploma in teaching English as a

second language

When not working: Tai Chi, meditation, waking along the beach

Business started: 2002

Website: [www.smarttutorreferrals.com](http://www.smarttutorreferrals.com)

## ESSENTIAL GODINE

Born: Vancouver Raised: Burnaby

Age: 55

Family: Husband Jeffrey, daughter Shannon 29, son Dustin 27

Education: B.A. in human and social development, Masters of Education both from UVic,  
certificate in human services, certificate in conflict resolution

When not working: Run, bike, and she's discovered a passion for dance

Business started: 2003

Website: [www.optionsforhealth.ca](http://www.optionsforhealth.ca)