

LIVING



Janet Smith with her daughter, Lorraine

STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Hitting the books at home

BY DAWN LIERSCH
STAFF WRITER

When Janet Smith noticed her daughter was struggling to learn to read at school, she brought the problem home.

Smith is one of a growing number of people turning to home schooling as an alternative way to educate their children.

"I had difficulties with the way my daughter was being taught to read. I had followed her progress through Grade 1 and Grade 2 and, by Grade 3, it had reached a crisis point. So, I took the bull by the horns," the Kettleby mom said.

First, Smith withdrew her daughter, Laura, from the public system and enrolled her in private school, where she was tested and found to be two years behind her grade level in reading.

Through the private school, Smith met a number of parents who had home schooled before or were considering home schooling.

Because of the costs associated with private school, Smith — a former teacher — decided to take over as primary educator for Laura and younger daughter, Lorraine, once she felt Laura had caught up.

Smith secured the text book list from the private school and tracked down the necessary material from The Book Man, a store in North York.

She points out there are several associa-

Janet Smith wasn't impressed how her children were learning — or not learning — in school. So she took matters into her own hands and turned her home into a classroom.

tions that sell home schooling packages, complete with curriculum lists, text books, tests and optional marking services.

But because most are U.S.-based, she warns, the Canadian parent must supplement or replace some curriculum content to include subjects such as French and Canadian history.

Smith added some parents turn to home schooling because they're dissatisfied with the religious content in schools and may opt to go to religious organizations for home schooling packages.

Smith decided not to hook up with an association, although she admits there may be value in it for some, particularly those home schooling more than one student.

Christine McIntyre ordered a package when she decided to teach her daughter, Kaity, and son, Joel, at home and found it to be an excellent tool.

"A lot of it is scripted. It tells you how to teach the subjects. There are also workbooks,

so your children can work independently and come to you when they have a problem," she said.

But, although the packages may be a great help, that doesn't mean being a home school teacher is easy.

In fact, McIntyre, a Newmarket resident, said she has high respect for teachers after doing the job.

"It's a lot of work and it's not for everybody," she said. "But it's also very rewarding."

McIntyre decided to home school because some of her daughter's former classmates were doing it and because Kaity really wanted to stay at home.

"She needs one-on-one tutoring. She needs someone to push her," McIntyre said.

McIntyre cites benefits to home schooling, such as being able to go back over certain material that seems to be a problem and moving at a faster pace in other areas.

"We go back until we get it right. In the classroom, it's more geared to middle-of-

the-road," she said, adding she also enjoys spending more time with her children.

Smith also pointed out weaknesses with the public school system:

"More and more kids are now slipping through the system and my daughter would have been one of them. The (public system's) curriculum is inadequate and the methodology is wrong. You have to teach the right stuff and teach it correctly," she said, adding she doesn't buy the excuse that teachers have a lot of students with various needs to contend with.

Teachers in the one-room classroom still managed to get students up to level.

Smith said she received little support from the education system when she informed officials she would be home schooling.

"They seem to wash their hands of you, as if to say, 'OK, let's see you do it,'" she said.

Although Laura was in Grade 5 when Smith decided to home school her, Smith said she did not hear from the board again until Laura was in Grade 8, when it requested testing before her daughter entered high school.

Despite the skepticism regarding home schooling, Laura tested to be at grade level or several years above grade level in all subjects.

"I had a lot of critics. Even within my own family, people said, 'You're crazy.' To be able

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