

As a young child growing up in New England (Massachusetts), I have always had a love for all things related to adventure, nature, animals, and outdoor living. Much of my time was spent outdoors doing activities like hiking, swimming, canoeing on the lake, jet skiing, biking, and camping. My love for the outdoors grew especially strong as I began to connect more with my surroundings with a respect for the natural beauty of my part of the state- The Berkshires, especially the flowers and animals including deer, bears, moose, geese, bobcats, and the wide variety of dogs that lived the outdoor life with their owners in my area. This passion for seeing the beauty in nature manifested into my love for art. I tend to gravitate towards painting and photography, with my childhood dream always being to become a wildlife photographer (I've attached a few photos I've taken to show you my eye for wildlife and nature photography). My uncle introduced me to the world of professional dog breeding and training since he specialized in breeding and training hunting dogs, specifically German short-haired pointers. I quickly bonded with his dogs in a way that natural and comfortable, and this passion for dogs never faded. I became fascinated with dogs and was eager to learn as much as I could about the purpose behind each breed and their specific characteristics.

Although my upbringing was filled with nature and dogs, it was also filled with struggles. I am a survivor of childhood abuse in the forms of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as physical and emotional neglect. I believe my emotional connection with the sensory experience of nature and the emotional bond with dogs is where I found peace in what would have otherwise been unbearable times for any child to endure. The canine companionship filled the loneliness in my heart. Despite the statistics, I later went on to graduate high school, earn my bachelor's degree, earn my master's degree in occupational therapy, and build a wonderful family of my own. But I never lost sight of my goal to help child push through their struggles to find happiness and healing. Given my personal experiences, I find that my ability to connect with dogs often serves my professional lift in the way I can connect with children with special need, specifically my patience with those who are nonverbal. I am able to read emotions and communicate without spoken language with these children in similar ways to how I can connect with dogs. This human-canine connection is built on emotions and patience, which is exactly how I make my students feel safe.

After facing my personal struggles with PTSD head on in 2022 (the same pain I had carried my entire life due to childhood experiences), I leaned on my 2 family dogs for emotional support when I couldn't find the words to express my pain to my family members. Truthfully, there were times that my dogs were the ones who got me through my toughest days. After finding my own happiness and healing through therapy, family support, and canine companionship, I know my personal, educational, and professional life experiences were for a reason- to help children find their way. It is now my company mission to make canine therapeutic support more accessible to children with special needs and their families to help support them on their path to find their own happiness and healing. That is how my company, Sweetheart Doodles, was born. My heart found a friend in these dogs, so my mission is to help others feel the same companionship that I did as a lonely child. Should funds be granted, they will go towards the purchase of our first breeding dog who will be health and genetic tested to ensure she comes from quality bloodlines to begin our breeding program (we already have the breeder selected and ready to provide the dog). Should you consider additional funding for our program, the funds would be used to renovate and develop an optimal whelping and puppy-rearing space that would allow for neurological and sensory input exposure to begin to foundational skills development techniques. I will also attach my professional business plan to this email to show exactly how funds would be used. Truthfully, I am beyond grateful for every single penny granted to support my mission.

I am proud to be an active participant in the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Department of Special Education. Additionally, I am in close communication with the Maryland- Central Chesapeake division of The Arc (supporting individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities) and the Maryland Autism Society. I am a member of the National Board of Occupational Therapy Certification (NBCOT) which maintains the highest quality standard for registered occupational therapists. Lastly, it is an honor to be part of a small circle of responsible breeders working together to donate dogs to individuals in need of canine support. We plan to specifically work with children/families and veterans (by donating dogs to Fidos for Freedom for disabled veterans) a small program I have created within my company Sweetheart Doodles called Sweetie Support. Sweetie Support is the group of breeders on a mission to donate. My greatest accomplishment is taking time to heal myself. I know this may sound small, but in a society

that often views working moms as someone who can (and should) be able to do it all, stepping away from my daily responsibilities came with significant judgement. It was a tough decision to make, but I had to listen to my heart. At the age of 37, after struggling for 3 years with symptoms of PTSD, I decided (with the support of my husband and children) to take 6 months off from work to focus on my health and wellbeing.

I traveled across the country and spent 30 days completely disconnected from society. I engaged in meditation, art therapy, and soul searching (plus lots of therapy) to heal my inner child. There was a trained therapy dog at the retreat who was an integral part of my trauma recovery journey. Upon returning home, I continued to focus on myself and my family. I am incredibly proud of myself and the time I took to honor myself. When I was ready to reenter my work life and social life, I had a new outlook on life and a new found internal peace.

Although they have passed, my first and forever mentors will always be my grandmothers. They helped my mother raise me during difficult family times, and I attribute much of my success today to the love and consistent support they showed me when I was growing up. I was allowed to honor my feelings but they never let me fall. In a scary world, I felt safety in their presence. My grandmothers helped me by consistently showing up to show me support. From them, I learned that showing up for someone matters. That consistency and routine support is an important aspect of life because it promotes emotional safety and meets unspoken expectations. I use these skills in my personal and professional life on a daily basis. Another mentor of mine is my actual dog breeding and puppy-rearing mentor, Colleen DuPont White. She is a wonderful woman who is an excellent and experienced breeder. For years she has been donating her dogs to children with medical conditions through St. Jude's Hospital. She offered to support me in the breeding process and even helped me gather a circle of breeders to join my mission. She has taught me that other good-hearted people with a desire to help others can be "the norm". She has taught me that questions are welcome, and any time I have needed her support she is patient and thorough. She has helped me connect with other breeders who share my mission to help others and I am excited to continue developing my working relationship and friendship with her.

In my opinion, Ryan's Core Principals means "what things matter most to you in order for you to live your happiest, most authentic life?". In short, "How can you live so you are true to yourself?" For me, this is everything I am focused on doing moving forward. My list of core values are the values I try to live by on a daily basis. I used to feel embarrassed by my desire to be kind and spread joy, but now I am proud to be able to make others feel comfort in my presence.

To prepare myself for my adventure, I will continue to build partnerships with organizations that work directly with families in need to ensure they know my business is available to them as a resource. I will also continue to add quality breeders to my circle of donating breeders so we have a variety of dogs available to meet specific needs.