



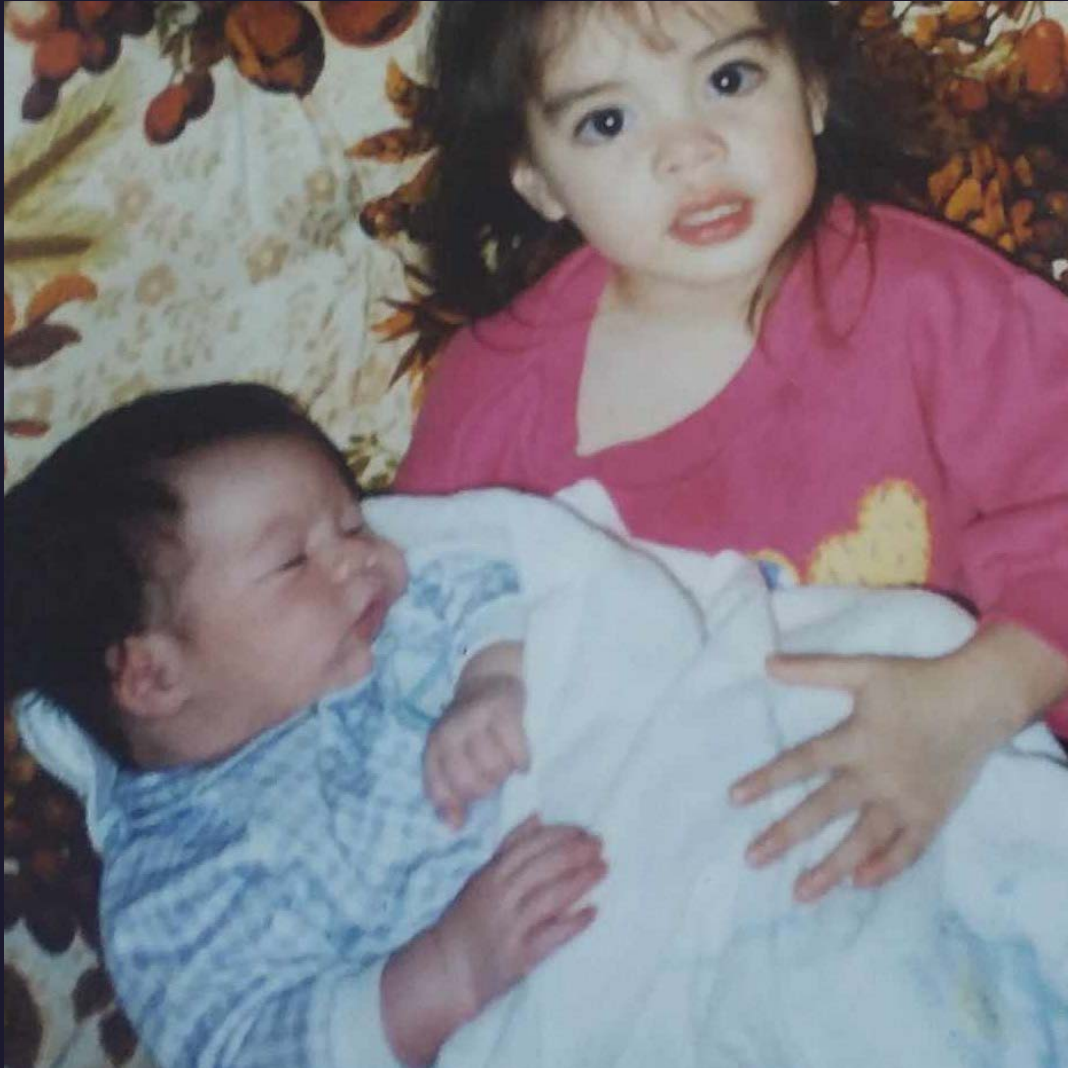
Thriving with Autism: The Power of a Wrap-Around Support System in Achieving Success

Matthew McDonald

November 9, 2023

re:con conference





Let's start at the beginning!

- I'm Matthew McDonald.
- I was born in Fairfax, Virginia in 1995.
- I was born premature and weighed a little over 5 pound by a C-Section.
- I have a sister two years older than me.

My Family

My father was in the marines stationed in Virginia and my mother was a drug addict.

When I was 2, my parents divorced, and I came to live with my grandparents in Michigan.



Charlotte, Michigan

I lived in Charlotte with
grandparents from age 2
to age 20.

Through the court system,
my grandparents received
guardianship of my sister
and I.





My Grandparents

I was a Grandma's boy and she spoiled me rotten!

Grandpa was a quiet man but attended all my sporting and scout events.






My Education



AGES 2 TO 4

- Eaton Regional Education Services Agency (EatonRESA)
 - Speech Therapy
 - Early On Services
- 

ELEMENTARY

- I started in young 5's
- I attended three different elementary schools in Charlotte through general education
- I was involved in baseball, soccer, and scouts
- I was a very busy kid and a bully to others
- I had friends at school but only one friend that I went to her house for birthday parties

MIDDLE SCHOOL

- I was bullied a lot by classmates
- I had violent outbursts at school
- I had thoughts of shooting up the school
- Suicidal thoughts started in middle school
- I was involved in baseball, basketball and scouts, also one year of band 😞
- I received social worker support
- I had one friend that we went to each other's homes.

The people I
loved the most
had enough of
my outbursts.





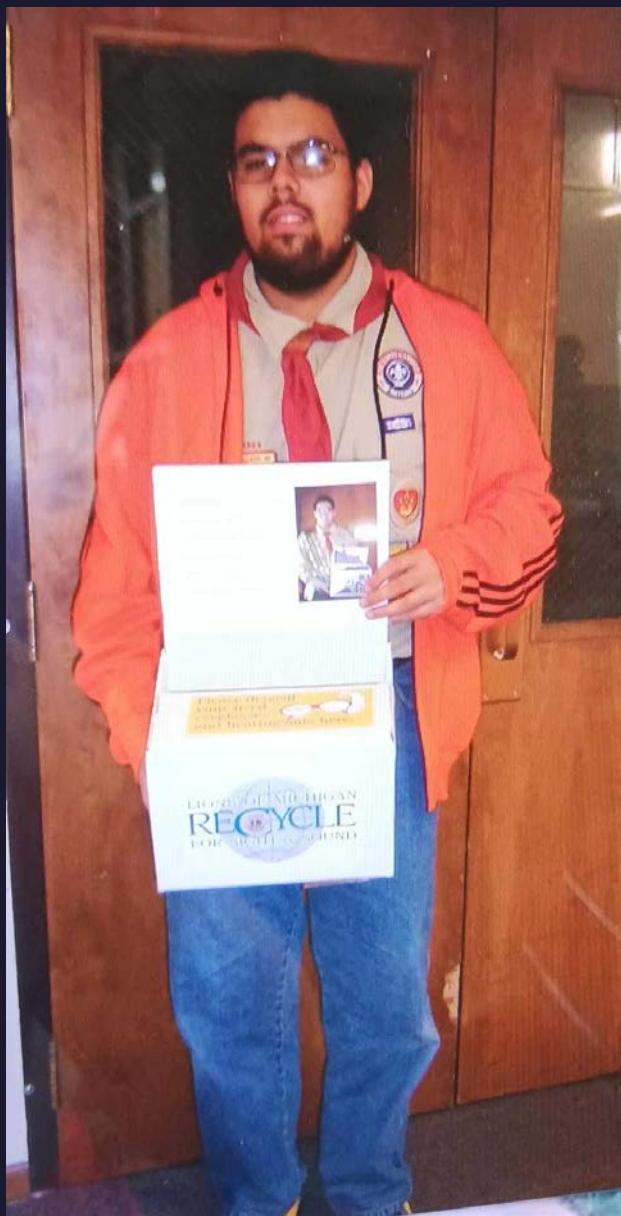
Charlotte High School



Freshman Year

- I was bullied
- I had 1.2 GPA
- I started working on my Eagle Scout
- I saw a social worker weekly
- I was in all general education classes and took a parenting class instead of sex ed
- A special education teacher talked to everyone that had autism at Charlotte High School about a new program she wanted to start, it became the Links Program.





Sophomore Year

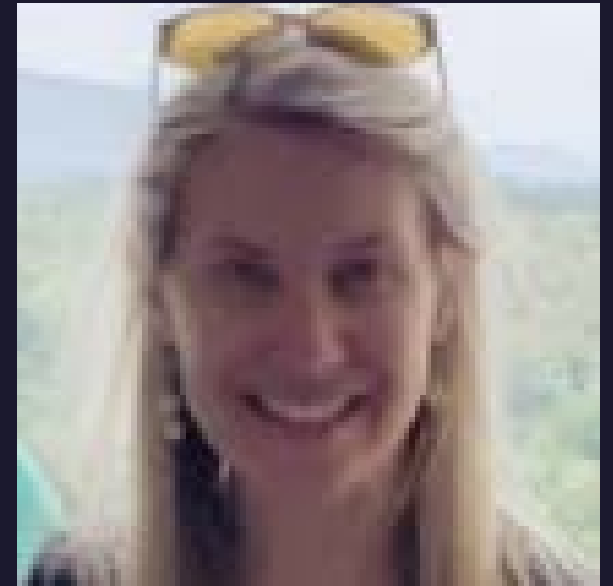
- I started the Links program
- My grades started to improve
- I participated in the GECKO program
- I continued to work on my Eagle Scout

Walmart 

Junior Year



- I made the Varsity Baseball team
- I had my favorite teacher of all time
- I started working out more
- I made the honor roll
- I received Eagle Scout
- I was in all general education classes with support of Links





Senior Year

- I continued with Links
- Varsity Baseball was EVERYTHING to me!
- I got all A's and B's and remained on the Honor Roll
- I still struggled with social skills
- I attended Prom





My mental health journey

It started in middle school, but I didn't realize it.

I started to see a psychiatrist and therapist in middle school

I have had 8 hospitalizations starting in middle school.

I didn't understand my emotions or feelings

I was very depressed and suicidal for many years.



Positive change

My therapy dog, Kara.
She was my best
friend!

We did everything
together.



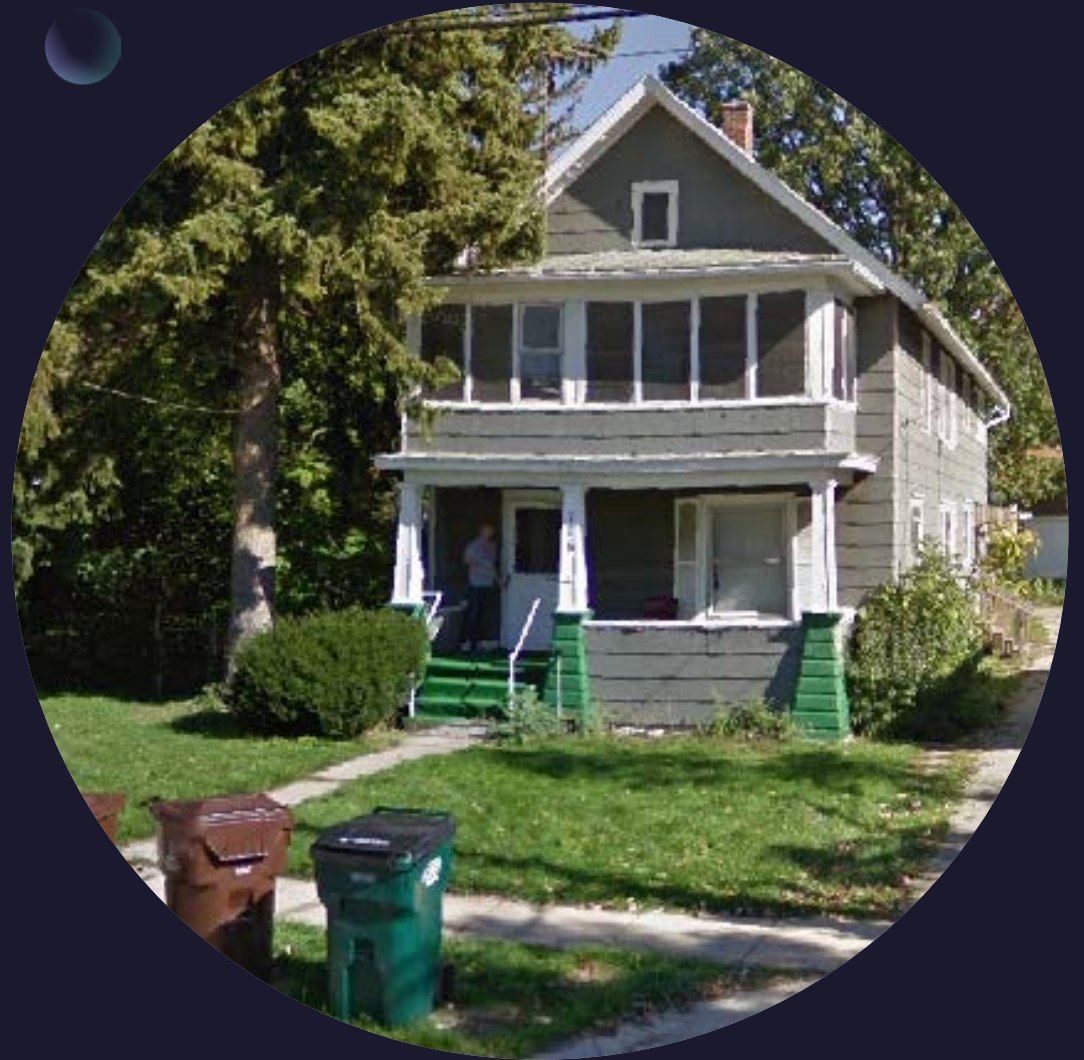
My adult life

I could no longer live with
grandparents

I lived in an AFC home for four
and a half years

I was the youngest in the home

It was dark and depressing time of
my life



Living with autism as an adult



- I have some vocal phrases I like to say
- I struggle with loud sounds, being in crowds and having people touch me.
- As Maria would say, “There is some gray in there”. I am a black and white thinker.
- I like to have a routine and schedule
- I struggle with organizing my space
- I have a special interest



This is hard for
me to look at.



Learning to
be proactive,
not reactive!

A circular photograph showing a stone building with a covered walkway. An American flag flies on a tall pole to the right. A young tree stands in the foreground on the left, and a paved path leads towards the building. The scene is set on a grassy lawn under a cloudy sky.

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My Work

I worked with MRS and I had three different counselors and worked with 2 different vendors.

I had a job training at TJ Maxx

I was featured in the Lansing District Office Newsletter.



When I started at ASPPIRE, I was unapproachable, angry and depressed.

Took several social coaching groups:

- Cooking
- Fitness/Walking
- Social Coaching
- Employment Skills
- SHARE
- Bowling
- Gardening

I made friends, found a support team and started to understand my emotions!







Love in my life!

We found each other on match.com

We've been together for almost 2 years

She is a Michigan State University graduate in nursing

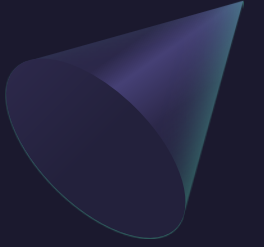
Together we have:

- Attended weddings
- Attended family funeral
- Camped with her sister and boyfriend
- Weekends at her parents' house
- Trips to Mackinaw Island
- Enjoyed sex

I'm still working on my communication skills, and it gets me in the doghouse from time to time



My Future Goals



GET MARRIED AND HAVE
A FAMILY

GET A HOUSE

GET A DRIVER'S LICENSE

A JOB IN LANDSCAPING

FRIENDS IN MY LIFE

MAINTAIN MENTAL
HEALTH

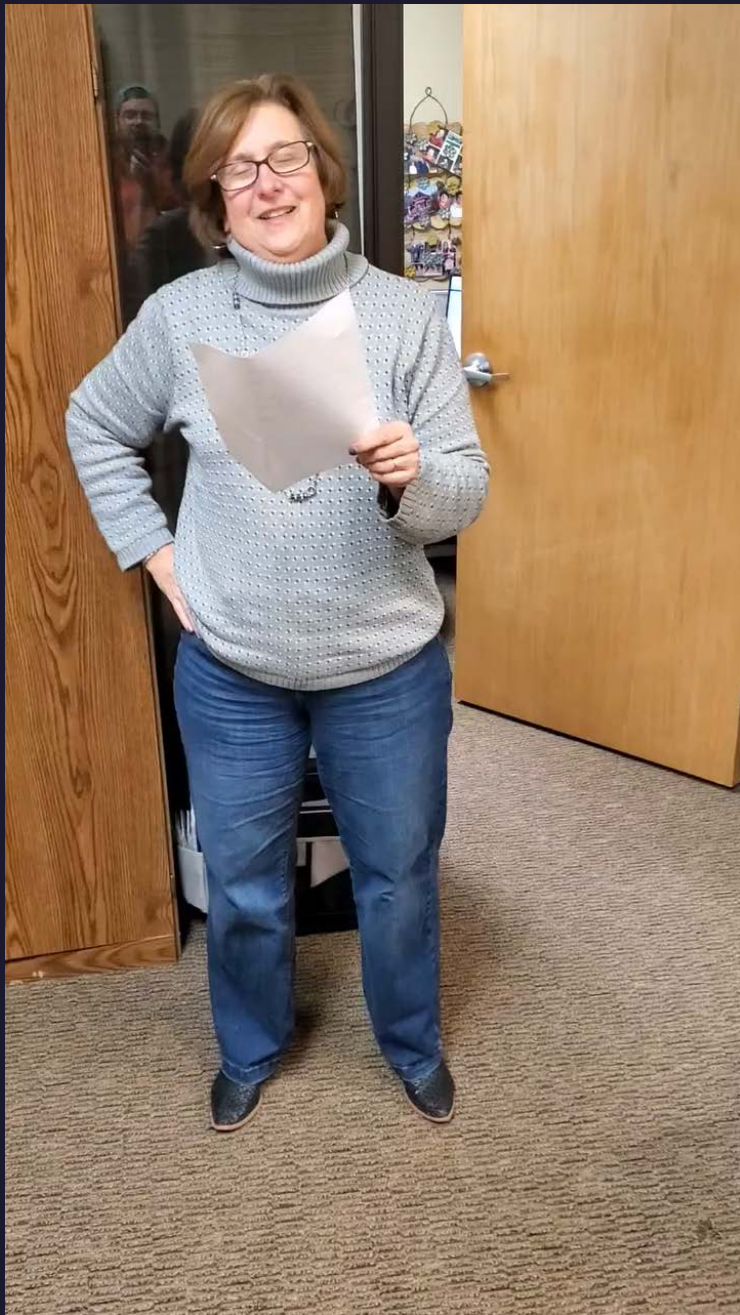
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

HAVE FUN AND ENJOY
LIFE!



Good ole' team rivalry







Thank You For Attending!

Keep in touch with me.

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