Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 8: “Sabrina Leaney (World Of Woof)”

RACHEL: Welcome to Out Of The Woofworks, here with me, Rachel Forday on a podcast where we'll be talking about dogs, dog training, and more importantly, human social issues, both in the dog industry and in the world.

Today, we have Sabrina Leaney with us. They are a dog trainer with their business World Of Woof, and they'll be chatting with us about neurodiversity, including how being neurodivergent may impact being a dog guardian and a dog trainer. They are great friend of mine and I'm so excited to speak with them.

[INTRO MUSIC]

RACHEL: Hey Sabrina. It's so wonderful to have you here. Thank you so much for taking the time out to chat with us.

SABRINA: Thank you so much for having me, Rachel.

RACHEL: So, could you start off by telling us a little bit about yourself?

SABRINA: Yeah, of course. So my name is Sabrina Leaney. I'm the founder of World Of Woof, which is dog training business that specializes in resource guarding.

So just for those who aren't sure what that means, uh, it's dogs who feel uncomfortable, potentially lash out when they think a valuable results is going to be taken from them. So that's what I do.

I was born in London, but grew up in France till I was thirteen, and moved back here [note: London]. And then I also lived in Argentina and Canada for a little while.

I identify as non-binary, so my pronouns are they/them, and I'm currently seeking a diagnosis, for potential ADHD. So I'm jumping through hoops to get that done because it's certainly not easy. Um,

what I found is the shame and guilt most adults feel around getting a diagnosis is real. Most days, I try to convince myself that I'm neurotypical because I feel like my symptoms are just character flaws.

So then I reach out to my neurodivergent friends in a meltdown, and they very often managed to remind me that even doing that is a sign that I probably do have ADHD.

So I'm a huge advocate for spreading more accurate and relevant information about neurodivergent brains. Um, people who struggle with identifying as neurodivergent and those who don't really feel like they know exactly what that means for them.

I started looking into the side of mental health about a year ago, cause I've always been misdiagnosed with anxiety and depression. And since then I've met more people who understand me and vice-versa than I ever have in my life. I no longer feel like I'm trying to fit in. I just very simply belong.

Um, so just like any mental health differences, there's always a spectrum. Some people will have severe ADHD. That means they need medication every day, can't function without it. Whereas others will have a milder form, so finding coping mechanisms to help you live your life or having a different dosage of medication, um, will help them more, you know, it's, it's all very different from person to person. We're all individuals.

And what I want people to know more than anything is just because you don't recognize the signs of neurodivergence in someone doesn't mean they are neurotypical. Don't dismiss the way someone feels, just because you don't look like you've got it. Mental illness is invisible in most cases. So, that's me.

RACHEL: Thank you so much for sharing that, and I really, really want to get into more about the stuff you said about neurodiversity and neurodivergence, because there's a lot to learn about, and that's where we really want to go into and how we can improve the industry in terms of those things. So could I start by asking you, how did you first get into working with dogs?

SABRINA: Yeah, of course. Um, my sister got German Shepard Husky mix when she was 19. And we quickly realized that she was a very nervous puppy. Um, we didn't handle that in the best way back then, because we were believing and following all the misinformation you find online.

So we used so many of aversives when we didn't know any better, including an e-collar for our unfenced backyard, which I deeply regret and wish it had never happened, but you don't know what you don't know and you live and you learn.

So you fast forward seven years. And I was done seeing her go from nervous to full on depressed when her basic needs weren't being met. So I started looking into the dog psychology and behavior. I then specialized in resource guarding due to my own history with eating disorders. So I relate to the fear, anger, and frustrations that these pups feel around the value that they place on food, toys, or other things.

I also know how distressing it is for the humans to feel like they have two different dogs, depending on the situation: the sweet and cuddly puppy can become aggressive and mean at the drop of a hat when there's something that they think is really important around. I have—I'm currently finishing up on my Victoria Stilwell Academy course.

Um, and I'm really enjoying that. And I've actually signed up for Michael Shikashio's Aggression in Dogs course as well. Um, I feel like all of these are really well related to my speciality and yeah, I haven't looked back since I started studying dog behavior and psychology.

RACHEL: Oh, that's brilliant. I think we all start from like, you know, having a dog that we love and just really wanting to help them and also being able to relate to them.

I love this meme on TikTok where it's like, "things you should have before you're thirty: a dog, anxiety, and a dog with anxiety." *[laughs]* I think that is so many of us. I think I am probably more anxious than Dave. But yeah, no, it's, it makes me laugh. But it is kind of true.

SABRINA: No, it's very true. Yeah.

RACHEL: And so what has the experience of being neurodivergent and, you know, living with a dog?

SABRINA: Uh, it has been an experience that's for sure. Um, so to give a little background, the dog that I mentioned earlier that my sister got nine years ago became mine in August of last year, so 2021. She has very severe separation anxiety and my sister had just graduated to become a vet, so her lifestyle was not going to suit this dog.

I work from home. I'm a dog trainer who started, um, what I do now due to this pup. So it made sense for me to take her on and help, um, help him feel better about the world.

That being said, it became really hard really quickly. So because of how my brain works and how easily overwhelmed I get, having a dog who felt the same way meant we triggered each other a lot.

So the setup I'm currently in, I'm in an apartment without an enclosed garden, which meant that she wasn't able to fully relax because she's so noise sensitive. So whenever people came in and out of the flat, she would—not react like she wouldn't bark or anything like that, but she would wake up, right?

And I could just see her face was super tense every time. And every time I saw that it made me tense, and so I couldn't relax. And then she couldn't relax and it became this feedback loop of anxiety all the time. So I was able to help her with her sensitivity to dogs and people, especially men, um, but I couldn't, I couldn't train her separation anxiety, and it's not that I didn't want to. It's—my brain literally wouldn't let me.

I felt overwhelmed as soon as I thought about working through that with her. I was already doing so much every day with her sensitivity and general nervousness that I thought I had no energy or time to myself, for myself, or my own business.

So I recently in January go into very deep depression and started having panic attacks at the slightest thing that went wrong. Couple that with perfectionism and overwhelm, and you've got a real problem.

So it got to a point where I didn't even want to walk her, despite my love of walking and knowing how much she loved her walks, because I would always take her to quiet places where she could roam around sniff to her heart's content.

And even replacing those with brain games instead, they just weren't enough. She just was never settled. So I started to resent her. I felt such shame and guilt around those feelings. Why couldn't I accept that she was a nervous dog? And despite that, because of all the work I've put in that she was happy.

Because I live alone, I know that was one of my biggest struggles. My living situation changed. I was meant to be moving into a house with an enclosed garden, and that didn't happen. Um, so that's when I had my real big depression phase. And I think it's because I had expectations on the life that I could give her, and those were all just taken away.

I felt like the rug had been pulled from under me. So I called my mom for support and asked her to move in with me for awhile and doing this, um, allowed me to take a week's break away from it all and get some perspective about my situation.

Um, I stayed with a friend for awhile. It was time to help adopt her out to a couple or a family who wouldn't mind her being with them all the time and who didn't have the base level of anxiety that I did.

So that's what I did. And she's now actually with my dog-sitter's great aunt and uncle in the country, and she is happier than ever. Uh, we get constant updates from them about how much fun she's having lounging around in the garden for hours, no interruptions from people she doesn't know, and freely walking in fields everyday.

And that has brought me so much peace. And in terms of the neurodivergent part, especially, it's interesting because with ADHD,

we really need to—to have things in front of us in order to remember that they exist as weird as that sounds, which is why a lot of people have problems with like produce in their fridge and things like that. Like fresh vegetables, because they go in drawers, you don't see them, and so you don't use them, and then they go bad and then you feel bad that they've gone bad, and that gives you anxiety. And it's all over the place. But with her, it sucked the first couple of days I was back. I was really, really sad, really in a lot of pain.

But since then, and again, this is it—it might sound awful to people who don't understand, but her not being here has helped me not feel bad. And has actually helped in my healing of myself, not having that constant reminder in front of me and getting those updates of course has helped a lot because I can see how happy she is running around everywhere, getting all the treats she wants, you know. She's a happy girl.

Um, so that was really reassuring, but. Yeah, it, it, it was a real struggle when things were going badly and I was spiraling and I didn't feel like I had the support I needed because of my neurodivergence not being understood. It became really, really hard to even just do daily things. Um, you know, I mean, like brushing my teeth, getting out of bed, that kind of stuff.

And then when the depression sets in on top of that, it just, it—you feel like things are insurmountable. Like you can't do anything.

RACHEL: Thank you so much for being so open and sharing that because that is so hard. And I think it's especially hard for us as dog trainers because, and also with being new at divergence, because you can really relate and empathize that the dog is struggling as well.

But that you are struggling and we, as people can't function or help our dogs effectively, if we are really struggling as well. And I'm sure that as you're dealing with these mental health issues that, you know, even though the dog is unintentionally, of course, causing additional stress, it is really hard to just kind of function in those ways.

And so I know that there can be a lot of stigma around rehoming a dog and things like that. But I think sometimes it's really important and I love how much you were happy with how she's doing now in a new home. It sounds like they're really lovely and I think that—

SABRINA: They're amazing.

RACHEL: It's such a relief.

SABRINA: Yeah. Yeah. It is. It’s a huge relief and it was so difficult as well to like let go, right? Because even though I was still struggling with the whole like, "Oh, I should be able to keep her, I should be able to do this." I should, should, should, should kind of thing because that's what society expects. That's what we've been told all our lives.
That's the messaging we've internalized is that we should be able to do these things, but then seeing, first of all, how relaxed these people were, like, even I relaxed around them because of how relaxed, and how easily she took to them, you know? And it was like,
"Okay, this is meant to be," and it was really hard to let go.

But at the same time, once I did let go, my God, the relief I felt, you know, and then you get guilt from feeling relief. And I mean, but that's when having a really, really good support system becomes so important because I reached out to, well, I mean, to you, to my other dog trainer, friends, and everyone kept reassuring me, like, "No, you've done the right thing for both of you. You're not being selfish. You're not giving up on her," right, or even giving her up.

Because I don't like those terms, I think they're very judgmental in a way. I re-homed her. I gave her the best chance so that she could have the best life because that just wasn't with me and accepting that is really, really difficult.

So that's part of what I want to help people with as well. It's understanding that I have gone through this experience, so I really do get how they feel.

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely, and that's a great point that you made the, um, about helping others. And so how does your experience

with being neurodivergent and also, you know, living with a dog that has been really hard for you, how does that carry over to when you work with your clients—you know, the dogs and the humans?

SABRINA: Yeah. Um, I've actually found that because I think so outside of the box that sometimes I don't even know where the box is. It's helped me massively with creative problem solving during dog training.

Um, every dog and their parents are individual, right? That's what we always say. That's what we have always been taught. They have specific needs, specific desires, and that will change from family to family. And I say family, because to me, even one person, one dog, that's a family.

So in order to be a good dog trainer, you do have to be malleable. And I think my neurodiversity actually makes me stand out from other trainers in that additional creativity as well.

The other side of that coin is I also have a real problem with regulating my focus, and feeling very easily overwhelmed means that sometimes it feels like my brain is working against me and shuts down. So I will sometimes completely blank on all the knowledge and experience I've collected, hesitate, and my aunt says, that can make me look like, I don't know what I'm doing.

I've also learned to mask a lot of my behaviors. Um, masking is something that people with neurodivergent brains do to "fit in," right? And I've done air quotes in "fitting in " because fitting in and belonging are very different things, but that's, that's a whole different subject. Um, but masking is things like picking out what you see neurotypical people do and trying to apply to yourself.

So things like stimming, which is stimulating your body... So I do this thing where I touch my fingers together a lot when I'm sitting down. Learning to like recognize when you're doing that and then stopping it, which can be really difficult, but that does mean that learning to mask some of my behaviors—not all of them—but that means I spend time thinking about whether or not I said the right thing or in the right way, or I will zone out during our conversation. And I literally lose track of what people are saying, or I interrupt

them or I try to finish their sentences and that can make it look like I don't care about what they have to say or that I'm being rude.

So I haven't really been vocal about my neurodiversity and my clients, because I've always felt like these were character flaws and that I was just a bit of a rubbish human, but I want all of that to change because thanks to the research I've done and the knowledge that my brain doesn't work, like the majority of the population, having met a lot of people like me.

I know that it's really important to spread that awareness and spread the actual good information. There's so much misinformation on the internet about what neurodiversity, what ADHD, autism, all of these things are. So I know that I want to work with people who either understand my experience because they've been through a similar one, whether it be themselves, a family member or a friend or, or someone else, or that they're willing to learn, be patient and emphasize—empathize—*[laughs]* emphasize —with the fact that my brain works differently to their.

'Cause I think that that is something I haven't given enough attention to when I have that conversation with people, and it's something that really takes over my brain during sessions to the point where, like I said, I zone out or interrupt or, you know, and, and so it seems like I'm rude, it seems like I don't care, but actually I care too much.

But because I haven't told them that my brain works a little bit differently, how can I expect them to then have that patience and empathy and understanding because to them, this is all kind of coming out of the blue. So I want to make sure that that's a big part of my conversation now.

RACHEL: I think it's so interesting that you said that as well, because when we can bring awareness to the things that we are going through, the things that we care about, like neurodiversity and neurodivergence, I think people feel more comfortable reaching out to us as well. So we think that it's a character flaws sometimes, but actually it's a big superpower, you know, it does help other people relate to us and feel like, "Hey, you're not alone."

So even with the dog trainer-to-client dynamic, I think it's helpful when our clients feel like, "Oh good. You know, I don't have to show up 100% perfect with my dog trainer." They understand, they're going through similar things, and I think that's really, really helpful. And, you know, as dog trainers, we have to understand our clients, you know, the ones that have come to us, they are really trying their best, like we are trying our best as well.

And there may be things that sometimes we ask them to do or try that just isn't possible for them right now. And so, like you say, trying to be creative and finding other ways, I think that's really important because there's this term "non-compliant client" that I find really frustrating—

SABRINA: Oh yeah, me too.

RACHEL: It is so frustrating, because it's not, it's not all clients being non-compliant, but it's almost to kind of tweak or change our suggestions that are, you know, safe and doable for both the person and the dog. And I think people are going through so much and some of it they may share with us—

SABRINA: Especially in the last three years.

RACHEL: Absolutely. Since COVID started I think, it has been really hard for people, um, you know, no matter what. And so when we are open and sharing our struggles, like you so kindly are here, I think that really helps our human clients feel safer about opening about their struggles as well. I think it helps us know how to help them too more effectively.

SABRINA: Yeah, absolutely. I'm a big believer in being vulnerable with people allows them to feel safe to be vulnerable with you, you know, even if they're not going through exactly the same thing or exactly the same problems, like for them to understand that it's a safe place to be with you is huge. Especially in a place in a time where we feel so unsafe in many places, um, to have those little pockets of home kind of thing, and I think that's, that's something that I really try to do as much as possible with my clients and now even more so with neurodiversity.

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely. And I think so much about dog trading sometimes we can get too stuck on how the dog is feeling and things like that. And while that is really important, I think we can all empathize with how the dog is feeling, especially their our own struggles, but the human has to feel good to be able to work effectively with our dog as well.

Just like you say, you know, with rehoming your previous dog, because it just wasn't a right fit in that sense. I'm so glad that I think there is a lot that frustrates me about the dog training industry in terms of—sometimes the organizations, the certifying boards, you know... I know we need regulation, but yet the thought of regulation who's making those regulations is—

SABRINA: Exactly.

RACHEL: It is a concern as well. And there are legislation, regulation, licensures that are getting proposed at the moment by the big organizations in our industry. But some of it, I have found to be quite ableist, quite classist, a bit, a little bit racist and—

SABRINA: A little bit racist. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: A little bit racist. *[laughs]* A lot racist. Absolutely. Um, just all of the nonsensitive-ness of it all. And those organizations sometimes have a history of saying, or doing insensitive and harmful things to the people of marginalized communities.

So I really wanted to ask you, like, what do you feel like does industry can do better in terms of supporting, uh, neurodiversity and neurodivergent people in terms of both clients, human clients, and the trainers?

SABRINA: Yeah, of course. I mean, I think, um, one of the first things is having a bigger variety in how trainers learn, right, and how clients learn as well, How we teach trainers and how we teach trainers to teach. So nowadays there are a lot more video-type classrooms which works so much better for me than walls of texts.

So I really struggle with, first of all, small fonts and walls of text. And I mean, even when it's like—me speaking to a friend and it's a wall

of text on a message. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to have to come back to this later." Um, because I read one line, then I get distracted. I reread the same line, I get distracted.

And that happens 10 times. And after a while, I just get frustrated with myself and I give up. So that meant, that has meant that I have missed out on a lot of learning opportunities that I've been really interested in, but the—oh, what is the word? See? Oh my gosh, this happens so often. Um, the. The method in which it was taught isn't right for me, and isn't the easiest way for me to learn. And it's actually very frustrating and I tend to give up because I get overwhelmed.

So with videos, I can put them on in the background or have my headphones on as I'm doing something else and I can go backwards and forwards when I want to. I can, if I start to zone out, which, you know, *when* I start to zone out or I'm not stimulated enough, I can stop without worrying about where I'm picking up, right. Because it will be in the right spot.

Another kind of support that would help would be trying to raise more awareness about neurodiversity and how different that can look for each individual. So, like I said earlier, this whole spectrum for each neurodivergent brain, not everyone will have the same symptoms or the same severity, or even two people might have the same symptoms that look a little bit different. That doesn't mean that that differences don't exist.

Um, one of the things I want to do now is raise that awareness for both trainers and their clients, because neurodivergent is still such a taboo subject in many social circles. It's surrounded by shame and guilt and stigma. So people don't talk about it, and I want to change that. Like even neurodiversity in media is so misrepresented and so—what is the word? Yeah... it's misrepresented and there's, um, and yeah, this is... sorry. Hello. Welcome to my ADHD brain.

It's misrepresented in the sense that, for example, I was watching a video the other day... About, um, oh, and for anyone who thinks they might have ADHD, um, "How to ADHD on YouTube, amazing videos, um, Jessica, something or other I'm very bad with names.

[note: *Jessica McCabe* of 'How to ADHD.'] Um, and she's incredible. And I've been down a rabbit hole of her videos and hyperfocusing on them until like two in the morning.

So, and she, she picks out really good examples of in the media, it being represented misrepresented. So things like there's a, *How I Met Your Mother* episode, where Bonnie or, um, Neil, Patrick Harris, has "ADHD." And I put this in inverted commas because he's like, "Oh, I'm so bored." And you know, it's so exaggerated and it's so like, that's not how people are, right.

That is not how we are represented in ourselves because of societal pressure, a lot of the time. And also when you're with someone who you feel like you don't need to mask as much, you *will* say things like, "I'm bored," but it won't come out so much in the like overly exaggerated, like, "I'm *so* bored," right, that kind of thing. It's more a frustration, because it's annoying that we're bored. It's annoying that that we're trying to stimulate ourselves and that we're just not able to find the right thing, that's giving us that dopamine hit that we need.

So, and now I've gone on a complete tangent haven't I.

RACHEL: No, that's okay. That's really good. That's really helpful.

SABRINA: And, and for example, one representation that's actually pretty good is New Girl, Jessica Day. Um, it's actually, Zooey Deschanel just playing herself because she has ADHD. And so she was like—and it's never said that the character has it in the series, but people who have have it recognize it and it's really interesting because she's just herself and therefore you, you see all of these different symptoms that you see within yourself, whether they're different or the same, or, you know, um, whether you have them or not. And that was really refreshing.

If anything, I wished they had said, "Oh yeah, this character has ADHD," but it's never highlighted. It's never put in the spotlight. And I think that was a missed opportunity for spreading awareness of what this is. And also a lot of times I heard as a kid, you know, ADHD is for little boys who bounce off the walls and who can't sit

still. And, um, first of all, females and women do get ADHD. It presents itself completely differently, a lot of the time.

Because there are three different types: there's external, internal and combined, and that's internal hyperactivity, external hyperactivity, and combined. And so people who fidget a lot, people who can't sit still, people who have a lot of stimming, those will generally be external. People who have the racing thoughts all the time, like I literally, every morning will wake up with a song stuck in my head, and it will be the same song throughout the day, the same lyric. It doesn't matter if I listened to the song, it doesn't matter if I sing it out loud, it doesn't matter what I do, it stays there. And recently it has been, “We Don't Talk about Bruno” from *Enchanted*.

RACHEL: Yes.

SABRINA: It's just that one line. It's a great song. The only thing is when you hear that one line over and over your head all day, it can get rather annoying. And, uh, oh gosh, I've lost my train.

RACHEL: Yeah. It's kind of an extreme earworm almost right. People talk about this earworm in my head, but for you it's even more intense, I'm guessing.

SABRINA: Yeah. Yes. It's, it's basically, it has stopped me from sleeping at night sometimes. Like it's been that intense and it's to the point sometimes where I literally cannot read, I can't watch videos. Like I can't. My mind will not be able to focus on anything else. It's almost like I've, hyperfocused on that one lyric and it's really frustrating. It's exhausting. Sometimes it feels like I'm at the end of my tether. Like I want to cry. It's so frustrating sometimes.

So, that's one of the reasons—and again, I've only been researching, I mean, "only," I've been researching all of this for a year, right. And this has included research online, which I'm sure I've gotten a lot of misinformation because when I've spoken to people who have been diagnosed and they've said, "That's not quite right," I've then had to go back and do more research, right?

Because again, so much information online, there's going to be a lot that is wrong information. Um, oh, yes. I was talking about the three types of diagnoses!

RACHEL: That's okay!

SABRINA: Combined is, um, when people have both, a lot of the time women will have internal and combined. External only is actually really rare in women and females because we've learned to mask our symptoms really well, especially. Society, you know... We internalize messages like, "Oh, she's just lazy. She has so much potential, if only she'd focused things"... like, "She's clumsy, she's forgetful."

Like all of this stuff is really, really harmful, really harmful, especially when you're at an age where you are so... The word... where if you're also easily influenced by what other people say around you. And these are figures of authority in your life, teachers, parents, or even other adults, *friends*. I mean, I have grown up, telling people that when I stay at that house, I will forget something. It's not even a case of like, I might, I now say to people, if I'm staying over, I will forget something. If I do—well, when I do, um—I will just get it next time or whatever it is. I might not even realize I've forgotten it until three weeks later when I'm looking for the thing, and I'm like, "Oh yeah."

This happened to me recently. I went to my friend's house for that week away, almost a month ago now. And I left a pair of shorts there and I didn't realize until I needed those shorts two days ago and then went, "Oh, okay." I have no idea where they are, spent half an hour looking for them, and eventually, I was trying to retrace my steps, and I was like, "Oh, I forgot them at my friend's house."

RACHEL: Oh, no. Well, they're still there.

SABRINA: Yeah. Oh yeah. They're still there. Yeah. This is only a couple days ago. So yeah, I mean, I hope they're still there. I haven't actually asked it. Again, that's another thing, right? If I don't do the things straight away, I have three different alarms for any medication that I need to take, any appointments I have, like I have to have at least alarms an hour, an hour and a half before and half

an hour before, because otherwise I will forget. I will dismiss it. And if I don't do it straight away, it goes, it's gone. That's it. My brain is like, "Nope, no more."

RACHEL: *[quietly]* 'No, no thank you'...

SABRINA: *[laughs]* Exactly. No thank you!

RACHEL: And I think like in terms of with the industry and with certifying dog trainers, the hard part is that the way that the organizations or the institutions have gone about it is in the classic kind of examination style, which doesn't work for work for people who are neurodiverse, it's really hard. And those fixed timings, those written questions, those sort of things are really, really hard.

And I think as well, another thing to consider is that a lot of the examinations or the sort of hours you have to collect in terms of being able to work with clients that always in-person hours, they're like group classes, or one-to-ones and actually for some of us, that isn't the way that we would do things in the most effective way for us. It could be virtual training that is more effective, but they don't count, and so that's really frustrating as well.

SABRINA: It really is. Yeah. So I used to do in-person training a lot and I cannot tell you the amount of times I would do an hour and a half lesson instead of an hour where I was only paid for that hour and underpaid for it as well.

But, unless I put a timer or two timers, because most of the time I had missed the first one, I would go over, every single time, because I don't have a sense of time. Like for me an hour and a half will have gone by, and I would've been like, "Oh, I thought it was only 20 minutes," you know? And it's, and people take advantage of that because those people, I will see them look at their watches and I won't think anything of it, and they'll see that the hour's up. But they weren't telling me because people take advantage of, you know, getting everything they can out of the person who's in front of them.

And I think neurodivergence, and neurodiversity not being as, well-spread out in terms of the awareness, means that people are taking advantage of those who are actually different and that's not okay.

I mean, people taking advantage of people's not okay in general, but even more so when it's someone who really doesn't realize it, every single time, because this would happen with the same clients over and over again. So it's not like different clients, and then once they realized they'd be like, "Oh, I'll try and keep track of it too"... People would just take advantage of every single time.

RACHEL: I'm so sorry that you have experienced that as well.

SABRINA: Now, I do virtual training. That doesn't happen anymore, it's great.

RACHEL: Great, I'm really glad. I do virtual trading as well. It just works for me. It feels safer and everything, you know? And so that's where I feel like the industry can change as well, to look at that as being a real legit way to be a dog trainer as well, that virtual training and that supports people who are neurodivergent or disabled or things like that as well, they're really all helpful in that aspect.

And I wanted to ask as well, I know we've gone into a sort of—

SABRINA: Yeah, sorry. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: No, no, don't worry about it, but like, you know, slightly sad side of the industry. I was wondering, if there has been any spaces in this industry or any communities in general that you have found that have been helpful in providing support for neurodivergence and mental health.

SABRINA: Um, so there is a great disability and neurodiversity advocate on Instagram called Whatever the Weather Animals [**note**: now @padventures__]. Um, so if you maybe add the handle at the end, like they're really, really great.

They talk about changing the industry to help it become more accessible to people who have sight, hearing, other disabilities as well as neurodivergent brains. And, like I love following them. I, they

have their own, I think he's a Mastiff, If I remember— Pad, I can't remember what kind of dog he is ... yeah, he is a Mastiff, and he is her assistance dog, which is amazing because you ever heard of a massive being an assistance dog.

RACHEL: I know, he's wonderful.

SABRINA: And I know he is, he's such a big softie, but what I love is that she's trying to change the way that people see assistance dogs, you know. You think Labrador, like you think, you know, there's typical breeds and you think Mastiffs need a heavy hand and it's like, she's literally breaking all of those things. All of those thoughts, all of those misconceptions are being broken through her awareness—spreading awareness of positive reinforcement, of helping accessibility, things like that for both, you know, people with disabilities and people with neurodivergent brains. It's amazing.

RACHEL: Yeah. Oh, that's really good. I will definitely put their handle on the show notes.

SABRINA: She's great. I love her. And I've found a few really amazing people, who've helped me accept that being different doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that I am broken. I don't need to be fixed. I just see the world differently. And that can actually, like you said earlier, be a superpower. Absolutely.

But there are not enough spaces or communities in the industry that represent neurodiversity, um, and that needs to change. And I actually really, really want to be a part of that change. I want to create a space that is safe for people who have neurodiversity, who are neurodivergent, and who just feel like they don't belong anywhere, because that can be the most alienating feeling.

And you can actually go back within yourself, you isolate yourself, you don't reach out and your life just gets more and more difficult and things just feel worse and less.

RACHEL: Yeah, no, I love that. You wanted to do that. I guess being on this podcast is kind of part of doing that as well and...

SABRINA: Yes, absolutely. Terrified of being here, but I'm also super excited.

RACHEL: Ah, I love that.

And I wanted to ask, are there any words of wisdom or encouragement or advice that you would like to share with dog guardians, dog trainers out there who might be experiencing things like this?

SABRINA: Yeah, I mean, the biggest message I want to send is that you are not alone.

You are seen, there will be, and there is a community out there for you. I want to be a part of those who create it, and I want people to know that neurodiversity is being talked about more and more. It is being opened up and the stigma is being removed more and more, especially about medication and things like that.

And I just want people to know that I'm here, like even if people don't want to work with me as a dog trainer, I am always happy to talk about my experience. I'm always happy to open up and to guide people into where, what places have helped me kind of come to terms, accept, and actually embrace my difference.

RACHEL: Oh, you're so wonderful and generous with that. How can people reach out to you and connect with you, if they want to learn more about what you're doing and just have a chat, really?

SABRINA: Yeah, of course. Um, so I'm quite active on social media, especially Instagram. Um, I don't get notifications because that would make me go insane. Um, so I, but I do check it every day. So my handle is @worldofwoofuk which I'm sure Rachel will put below anyway.

RACHEL: Absolutely, yeah, will do.

SABRINA: I also have my own website where you can sign up for my mailing list. You can get yourself a freebie video. It's worldofwoof.org. And if anyone wants to get in touch with me by email it's hello@worldofwoof.org.

And like I said, I'm happy to talk about all things neurodivergent, I'm happy to, you know— um, I, I will ask Rachel as well to put down the, "How to ADHD" and stuff like that for YouTube—and different types of people who would be able to help you, either accept, learn more about it, or even get a diagnosis for yourself.

RACHEL: That's brilliant. Thank you so, so much for being here with us today and for sharing all your insight and perspective into all of these things, because I'm sure, like you say, you know, people who are listening to this who are relating to a lot of what you've said, you're not alone.

I love that Sabrina is here to help you all and chat with you on if you want to reach out. And there is a community and it will be really good that people get the social support that they need, because at the moment, in terms of getting it from the industry and industry organizations itself, it can be really hard. So it's kind of... We have to do it from the ground up ourselves and find our people really, but yeah.

SABRINA: Yes, watch this space.

RACHEL: Yes, watch this space! Thank you so much.

SABRINA: Thank you so much for having me, Rachel.

RACHEL: Thank you. Bye!

[OUTRO MUSIC]

RACHEL: Thank you all so much for listening. As this episode was pre-recorded, Sabrina mentioned the instagram account @whatevertheweatheranimals before the account changed their name to @padventures__. But as always, you can find links to the accounts and sites mentioned and transcriptions in our shownotes. If you can't find the link in the description, you can find them on my website, dogatheart.co.uk/podcasts. If you enjoyed the podcast and would like to support us in what we're doing, you can buy us a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/dogatheart.

And you can get updates about future guests and episodes on our Instagram @dog_atheart. I'll see you in the next one!