

My name is Candyce Morgan, and I am a senior at Jonesboro High School in Arkansas. I began my own business a few years ago called *"Candy Cane Characters!"*

PURPOSE: I have a deep passion for singing, dancing and acting, as well as a love for children, so I incorporated those things together to begin a business where I dress up as different characters for children's parties and entertain them by singing, dancing, reading stories, playing games, singing "Happy Birthday," signing autographs, doing photo sessions, and helping lead the party. My slogan is "Make Your Child's Party Come Alive!"

ORIGIN: My aunt had a former business where she did all the set ups and decoration for elaborate children's parties and asked me to dress up as a character for one of them. That's when it sparked that I should start my own business dressing up as multiple characters for children's parties!

INNOVATION: I developed costumes, characterizations and associated songs, stories and games for each of my characters. I created fliers for distribution and have my own website, www.candycanecharacters.com. I am currently in the process of setting up a Facebook fan page!

STRATEGY: In order to promote my business, I do email blasts and pass out fliers to daycare centers, teachers and friends and of course, to parents of children who attend my parties. I have donated several parties at charity auctions, which have all been very instrumental in getting the word out about my business. For the past two years, I have dressed up as an Elf for a local toy store, where the author of the nationally popular book *"Elf on a Shelf"* visits for special book signings, and I have distributed my fliers at those events, which has produced quite a bit of business! I also have a business relationship with a major children party planner in Memphis, who advertises my business on her website, which has generated several parties! I have also purchased a few ads for local publications, but try to keep my expenses as low as possible. I have learned that word of mouth is usually the best policy, and have posted several parent referrals on my website.

COMPANY'S GROWTH SINCE INCEPTION: Getting started always takes time, but as people have learned more about my business, my business has grown. In the first two months of this year alone, I have already done what my business did the entire year last year!

SUCCESES: For me, each and every party I do is a success, because I get to watch children's and parents' faces literally light up the room when they see their favorite character entertain them. For almost every one of my parties, I have been paid far and above the amount I charge. I have been hired repeated times for the same child, as well as their siblings and friends. I have even gotten several babysitting jobs from developing those relationships from my business. I have had many wonderful experiences doing this business that I love, but one really stands out in particular. I was playing "Tinkerbell" for a party at *Chuck E Cheese's* restaurant. As I was leaving the party, many other children playing in the game room wanted to come over and talk to me. I knelt down to one of them and began talking to her and she had a beautiful smile on her face and reached out to hug me. I looked up at the lady she was with, who had tears in her eyes and asked if she could take my photo with the little girl. She explained that she was her aunt and that they had just buried the little girl's father a few days ago and this was the first time the little girl had smiled or even spoken to anyone in a very long time. She thanked me over and over for taking the time to

stop and talk to the little girl and expressed how much it meant to her. I left there so immensely touched, I had tears streaming down my cheeks!

OBSTACLES: The perk of owning your own business is that you get to set your own hours! The only obstacle I have encountered is the fact that all of my extra-curricular activities; i.e., Dance Team (recently selected “All Star Dancer” by the Arkansas Athletics Association), Choir (recently made “All State Choir”), Musical Theater (been casted in many musicals with four lead roles), Church Youth Group (lead in praise and worship) and other activities, take up quite a bit of my time, so those things and other booked parties force me to have to turn people down when they call. Children have only one birthday a year, so if I miss their day, it’s a pretty big deal!

FUTURE EXPANSION PLAN: I plan to incorporate other popular characters into my business, as clients request them.

COMPANY’S LONG TERM VISION: I plan to keep my business going through college and beyond, as long as I am able and as long as I keep enjoying what am doing and making children happy, because that’s truly what this business is all about.....bringing joy to others!

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION: As an extension to my character business, I have also donated my time to visit sick children in hospitals, including St. Jude’s Children Hospital in Memphis. I pass out little wands, other toys, stickers and candy to the children, just to help bring a smile to their faces and offer them some encouragement. I have learned that taking the time to give of yourself to show care and concern reaps great rewards, and I have truly been blessed through my business!

I plan to major in Performing Arts in college, and this scholarship will greatly assist me in that endeavor, so your consideration in honoring me with this award would be greatly appreciated!