



# More Than Instructors:

The Hearts and Stories Behind Our School  
Changing Lives Martial Arts

Whitepaper by:

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# **More Than Instructors**

**The Hearts and Stories Behind Our School**

**Changing Lives Martial Arts** *Virginia Beach and Chesapeake*

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**MORE THAN INSTRUCTORS**

The Heart and Stories Behind Our School

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## Foreword: Why We Wrote This

Most people meet a martial arts school the same way. They see a sign, they walk past a window, they watch a class through the glass. They see uniforms, belts, kicks, and punches. What they do not see is the people.

We wrote this Whitepaper to change that.

If you are reading this and you already train with us, you are part of the reason it exists. You are not an outsider looking in. You are family, and this Whitepaper is as much a thank you to you as it is an introduction to anyone new. And if you are meeting us for the first time, welcome. When you bring your family to Changing Lives Martial Arts, you are not signing up for a sport. You are handing us something far more valuable. You are trusting us with your child's confidence, your teenager's discipline, your family's time, and the values that get reinforced every time someone steps onto our floor. That is a serious trust, and you deserve to know exactly who is standing on the other side of it.

So, this is not a brochure. It is an introduction.

There is something else you should know about the three of us before you read another page. The character and life skills we teach are not a curriculum we picked up somewhere and decided to pass along. They are the principles we have built our own lives on. The discipline we ask of a white belt is the discipline that got each of us through our hardest seasons. The perseverance we preach is the perseverance that kept this school open on the days it would have been easier to quit. The respect, the confidence, and the quiet leadership we work to instill in every student are the same things we have leaned on as parents, as partners, and as people. We do not teach these skills because they sound good on a wall. We teach them because we have lived them, tested them, and trusted our own lives to them. You cannot give away something you do not own, and we have spent decades earning the right to hand these things to your family.

That is the difference we hope you feel in these pages. Anyone can recite values. We have tried to become them.

In the chapters ahead you will see how the training shows up in every part of a person's life, at school and at work, at home, among friends, and in the body itself. You will see what it does for the youngest preschooler and for the oldest adult. Then you will meet the three partners who lead this school, and you will understand why we believe so deeply in what we do.

We are more than instructors. We hope that by the end of this Whitepaper, you will feel like you already know us. Because the truth is, we would like to know you too.

With respect,

***The Partners of Changing Lives Martial Arts***

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## Chapter 1: One Mission

A school is only as strong as the agreement at the center of it. Three leaders can have three different temperaments, three different teaching styles, and three different stories, and still pull in exactly the same direction, as long as they share one mission. That shared mission is the foundation everything else in this Whitepaper is built on.

At Changing Lives Martial Arts, our name is our purpose. We are not in the business of producing fighters. We are in the business of changing lives. The mat is simply where it happens.

### **Three partners, one purpose**

The three of us are equal partners. Not in title only, but in voice, in responsibility, and in the weight we each carry for this school. We came together the way the best teams always do, as like-minded people who wanted the same thing and trusted one another to build it. Each of us leads the area that fits us best. Matthew holds the vision and direction of the company as Chief Executive Officer. LainaLee owns the quality and standard of everything taught as Director of Training. Shannon keeps the entire operation running as Operations Director. Three different strengths, three different lanes, one shared mission. Together we run Changing Lives Martial Arts in Virginia Beach and Chesapeake, and we run it as partners who answer to the same purpose and to one another.

### **What we believe**

We believe that the skills that matter most are not the ones you can see. Anyone can learn to throw a punch. Far fewer learn to stay calm under pressure, to finish what they start, to stand up for themselves and others, and to lead with humility. Those are the skills we are really teaching. The physical curriculum is the vehicle. Character is the destination.

We believe confidence is built, not born. We watch it happen in real time, in the shy child who finds their voice, in the adult who walks in doubting themselves and walks out standing taller, in the teenager who learns that discipline is a form of self-respect.

We believe a school should make a family stronger, not busier. The lessons learned on our floor are meant to travel home, into how our students treat their parents, their siblings, their teachers, and themselves.

We believe respect is the first technique and the last. It is where every class begins and the standard every student is held to, including us.

### **Our shared values**

These are the values the three of us hold one another to, and the values we teach:

- **Respect.** For self, for others, for effort, and for the standard.
- **Discipline.** Doing what needs to be done, especially when it is hard or no one is watching.
- **Perseverance.** Falling down is expected. Getting back up is the lesson.
- **Confidence.** Earned through effort, expressed through humility.
- **Community.** We rise by lifting others.

### **One mission, stated plainly**

To change lives by building character, confidence, and community, one student and one family at a time.

That is the agreement at the center of this school, and it is the promise behind every chapter that follows.

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## Chapter 2: More Than Instructors

There is a moment in almost every student's journey that has nothing to do with martial arts.

It is the day a child who used to hide behind a parent's leg raises a hand to answer a question. It is the night a parent says their teenager set the table without being asked. It is the quiet confession from an adult student that, for the first time in years, they feel strong. None of those moments happen because someone learned to break a board. They happen because someone learned something about themselves.

That is the difference between teaching martial arts and changing lives, and it is why the three people who lead this school think of themselves as more than instructors.

An instructor teaches a curriculum. A mentor teaches a person. The curriculum is the same for everyone who walks in, but the person is always different, and the real work is in knowing the difference. It is in seeing which child needs a push and which one needs patience. It is in recognizing that the adult who keeps skipping class is not lazy, but overwhelmed, and meeting them where they are. It is in understanding that a black belt is not the goal. The person who earns it is.

This is what we mean by character development and life skills, and it is woven into everything we do, not added on top of it.

**Focus and self-control** are trained the same way a technique is, through repetition, correction, and practice, until staying calm under pressure becomes a habit rather than a hope.

**Discipline** is taught as freedom, not punishment. The student who can make themselves do the hard thing is the student who gets to decide their own future.

**Confidence** is never handed out. It is earned rep by rep, so that when a student finally believes in themselves, the belief is real, because they built it.

**Respect and leadership** are modeled before they are taught. Our senior students mentor the younger ones. Our instructors mentor the seniors. And the three of us hold one another to the same standard we ask of a white belt on their first day.

We want to be honest about how this actually works, because the word transformation gets thrown around so casually that it has nearly lost its meaning. Real change is not loud. It does not happen in a single dramatic class or because of one inspiring speech. It happens in the small, unglamorous repetitions that no one posts about. A child ties their belt for the hundredth time and finally gets it right. A teenager loses a sparring match, sits with the disappointment, and shows up the next day anyway. An adult who swore they were too old to start something new earns their first stripe and remembers what it feels like to be proud of themselves. Those are the

moments where character is actually forged. We simply create the conditions, hold the standard, and refuse to let anyone quit on themselves.

The next several chapters follow those skills off the mat and into the places they matter most, at school and at work, at home, among friends, and in the body itself. Because the real measure of this training is never what a student can do in class. It is who they become everywhere else.

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## Chapter 3: At School and Work

The truest test of anything learned on the mat is whether it survives the moment a student walks out the door. The skills we teach are built to do exactly that. They are not designed for the dojo. They are designed for the life that surrounds it, and nowhere is that more visible than in the places people spend their days, the classroom and the workplace.

**For our youngest students**, the preschoolers, it begins with the simplest and most important habits a person ever learns. How to stand still and listen. How to follow a direction the first time. How to take a turn and wait for it. These sound small, but they are the foundation of every classroom a child will ever sit in. A four-year-old who learns to focus their eyes on the instructor and their body on the task is a four-year-old who walks into kindergarten already ahead, not in letters and numbers, but in the ability to learn at all.

**For school age children**, the training shows up in report cards and in the notes teachers send home. The same discipline that gets a child through a difficult drill gets them through a difficult worksheet. The same respect they show their instructor, they begin to show their teacher. Parents tell us the change often appears first in the small things, a child who raises their hand instead of calling out, who finishes homework without a battle, who handles a bad grade as a reason to try again rather than a reason to give up. Focus is a muscle, and we give children a place to build it.

**For teens**, the years grow more complicated, and so does the value of what they carry. School becomes a pressure cooker of grades, social standing, and decisions that feel enormous. A teenager grounded in discipline and self respect moves through it differently. They are less rattled by a hard test, less swayed by a bad crowd, and more able to keep their eyes on a goal that is months or years away. The teen who has learned to push through a plateau in training is the teen who pushes through a hard semester instead of quitting on themselves.

**For adults**, the classroom becomes the workplace, and the lessons translate cleanly. The focus that helps a child sit still helps an adult cut through distraction and finish what matters. The composure trained under the pressure of sparring helps a professional stay level in a tense meeting or a hard conversation. Many of our adult students tell us the greatest gift is not physical at all. It is the ability to manage stress, to walk into a demanding day with a settled mind, and to carry themselves with a quiet awareness of the people and situations around them. In a world that runs on noise and reaction, the person who can stay calm and present has an advantage that follows them everywhere.

Across every age, the lesson is the same. The mat is practice. School and work are the performance. And what we are really training is a person who shows up ready for both.

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## Chapter 4: At Home

If the training only worked in public, it would not be worth much. The place character is tested most is the place no one is watching. It is the home, where the masks come off and people are simply who they are. We measure our work by what happens there.

**For preschoolers**, home is where the first lessons take root. A small child who is learning respect on the mat begins to mirror it at the dinner table and at bedtime. The structure of class, the same greeting, the same routine, the same expectations, gives a young child a sense of order they crave, and that order follows them home. Parents often notice their preschooler listening a little better and melting down a little less, because the child is learning that rules are not the enemy. They are what makes the world feel safe.

**For school age children**, home is where responsibility is born. The student who learns to care for their uniform and bow before they step on the mat is learning to take ownership, and ownership spreads. It shows up in a bedroom that gets cleaned without a fight, in chores done without a reminder, in a younger sibling treated with a little more patience. We teach children that respect is not something you save for your instructor. It is something you owe the people who love you most.

**For teens**, home can become a battleground, and the training offers a different path through it. A teenager with self discipline and self respect argues less and listens more, not because they have been forced to, but because they have learned to govern themselves. The perseverance that keeps them coming back to a skill they have not mastered is the same patience that lets them sit through a hard conversation with a parent instead of slamming a door. We have watched the training soften the hardest seasons of the teenage years, not by changing the teenager into someone else, but by giving them the tools to be the best version of who they already are.

**For adults**, home is where the day is either redeemed or surrendered. An adult who has learned to manage stress brings home a steadier presence, more patience for their children, more attention for their partner, more peace for themselves. They model the very things they hope to instill, because their kids are watching how they handle a long day far more closely than they are listening to any lecture. The greatest thing a parent can teach is who they are when they are tired, and our adult students often tell us the training made them someone they are prouder to be at home.

A school does not raise a child or hold a marriage together. Families do that. But the right training strengthens the hands that do the work, and that is the role we are honored to play.

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## Chapter 5: Socially

Human beings are built for connection, and the skills that help a person connect well are some of the most valuable they will ever learn. They are also some of the hardest to teach, because they cannot be lectured. They have to be lived, practiced, and felt. Our floor is one of the best places we know to learn them.

**For preschoolers**, the social lesson is foundational. A young child learns to share space with others, to keep their hands to themselves, to celebrate a friend's success instead of resenting it. In a class full of other small children, a preschooler learns the first rules of belonging to a group, and they learn them through play, which is exactly how a young child is built to learn.

**For school age children**, class becomes a second circle of friends, often a kinder one than the playground. Children who feel awkward or left out elsewhere find that the mat does not care who is popular. It only cares who tries. That levels the field in a way few places do, and shy children come out of their shells while high energy children learn to channel themselves. The friendships formed here tend to be built on effort and respect rather than status, which makes them some of the healthiest a child will have.

**For teens**, the social stakes are at their highest, and so is the value of what we teach. Peer pressure, comparison, and the constant pull of screens make adolescence socially brutal. A teen with real confidence, the kind earned through accomplishment rather than handed out, is far less likely to bend to a crowd or chase approval in unhealthy ways. They have a place where they are known, a group that expects something of them, and the self respect to say no when it matters. For many teens, the school becomes the steady ground beneath an unsteady age.

**For adults**, social connection often becomes the quiet surprise of training. Adults arrive focused on fitness or self defense and discover something they did not know they were missing, a community of people from every walk of life who share a goal and show up for one another. In a stage of life when making real friends is famously difficult, our adult students build genuine ones, the kind forged by sweating through the same hard class side by side. The belonging becomes as valuable as the training itself.

At every age, the lesson underneath is the same. You become like the people you surround yourself with, so surround yourself well. We work hard to make this a place worth being surrounded by.

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## Chapter 6: Fitness

Fitness is the most visible benefit of martial arts and, in a way, the most misunderstood. People come expecting a workout. What they find is something better, a kind of fitness that has a point, a fitness driven not by guilt or vanity but by a goal worth chasing. That difference is everything.

A treadmill asks you to repeat the same motion until the clock runs out. Martial arts asks you to master something. Every class moves a student closer to a tangible goal, the next stripe, the next belt, a technique that would not work last month and works now. The body gets stronger as a byproduct of pursuing that goal, which is why our students stick with training when other routines fall away. They are not exercising. They are progressing, and progress is the most powerful motivator there is.

**For preschoolers**, fitness means developing the body they are still learning to control. Balance, coordination, the simple ability to hop, kick, and move with intention. These are the building blocks of physical confidence, and a young child who feels capable in their body carries that assurance into everything else.

**For school age children**, training offers an outlet that screens and sedentary habits never will. It builds strength, agility, and stamina, but more importantly it teaches a child that their body is something to develop and be proud of. In an age of rising childhood inactivity, giving a child a reason to love moving is a gift that protects their health for life.

**For teens**, fitness becomes tied to identity and self worth. A teenager who is getting stronger, who can see and feel their own progress, carries themselves differently. The training channels enormous energy into something constructive, builds a body image grounded in capability rather than comparison, and gives a teen a healthy obsession at exactly the age when unhealthy ones compete for their attention.

**For adults**, fitness is often the door they walk through and rarely the reason they stay. Yes, the training builds real strength, conditioning, and flexibility, and yes, the weight tends to take care of itself when a person actually enjoys the work. But adults quickly discover that goal driven training does for the mind what it does for the body. It relieves stress, sharpens focus, and restores a sense of accomplishment that the daily grind often strips away. They came to get in shape. They stay because they feel like themselves again.

Fitness, the way we teach it, is never the goal. It is what happens to a person on the way to becoming who they are capable of being.

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## Chapter 7: In Our Community

A martial arts school can be one of two things. It can be a place people drive to, or it can be a place a community is built around. We have always chosen the second.

Changing Lives Martial Arts is not separate from the neighborhoods it serves in Virginia Beach and Chesapeake. It is part of them. The families who train with us are our neighbors, our friends, and the people we see at the grocery store and the school pickup line. That closeness is not a side effect of what we do. It is the point.

A community minded school shows up. It shows up at local events, supports the causes its families care about, and opens its doors when the neighborhood needs a place to gather. It celebrates the wins that have nothing to do with rank, the report card that turned around, the bully who got stood up to, the family that found its footing again. And it understands that every student who grows in confidence and character becomes someone who makes the wider community a little better, too.

We think of this as a responsibility, not a marketing strategy. A school holds a unique place in a community. Children grow up inside its walls. They arrive as nervous five-year-olds and leave as confident young adults, and in between, we get a front row seat to who they are becoming. Few institutions get that kind of access to a person's character during the years it is being formed. We do not take that lightly. With that access comes an obligation to model the very things we teach, to be the kind of adults we are asking our students to become, and to treat every family who trusts us as a relationship rather than a transaction.

That is the quiet multiplier effect of this work. We change one life, and that life goes on to change others. A confident child becomes a steady teenager, who becomes a capable adult, who raises confident children of their own. A school does not just train students. Over time, it helps shape the character of an entire community, one family at a time, year after year, long after the belts are tied and the trophies are put away.

We take that responsibility seriously, and we are proud of it. When you join Changing Lives Martial Arts, you are not just enrolling in classes. You are joining a community that is invested in you, and that will be better for having you in it.

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## Chapter 8: The Partners

You have read about what this school does. Now you should meet the people who make it happen, because in the end, a school is only ever as good as the people leading it. Behind Changing Lives Martial Arts are three equal partners who came together as like-minded people with one shared mission and three different strengths. None of them runs the school alone. All of them answer to the same purpose and to one another.

**Matthew Guse, Chief Executive Officer**, holds the vision. He is the one who keeps one eye on today and the other on where this school is going. He carries the questions most students and parents never see. How do we grow without losing what makes us special? How do we serve more families without ever treating a single one like a number? How do we make sure the school that changed so many lives is still standing, and still true to itself, twenty years from now? Those are the burdens of leadership, and they are his to carry.

**On vision: the long view** "A school that loses its way fails the very families it promised to serve. My job is to make sure we never do, so that the student who walks in twenty years from now finds the same school that changed lives on the very first day." *Matthew Guse*

**LainaLee Rambow, Director of Training**, is the keeper of the standard. She is the reason a technique taught on a Tuesday looks the same, and means the same, six months later. She decides not just what students learn, but how it changes them along the way. Instruction delivers information. Training transforms a person, rep by rep and correction by correction, until the lesson lives in the body and not just the Whitepaper. That transformation is her craft, and the growth of every student passes through her hands.

**On training: who they become:** "Anyone can show a student what to do. My job is to change who they become while they do it. When the training is right, the confidence a student builds on the mat is theirs for life, and it never leaves them." *LainaLee Rambow*

**Shannon Guse, Operations Director**, makes the whole machine work. Vision inspires and training transforms, but neither reaches a single family unless someone makes the doors open on time, the schedule makes sense, the communication goes out, and the thousand small details line up so a parent's experience feels effortless. That work is mostly invisible when it is done well, which is exactly the point. The smoother your experience, the harder she worked behind the scenes to give it to you.

**On operations: the unseen work** "Families never see most of what I do, and that is exactly how it should be. When everything runs the way it should, a parent gets to focus on the only thing that matters, watching their child grow." *Shannon Guse*

Three strengths, three lanes, one mission. What makes this partnership work is not that the three of them are the same. It is that they are different in exactly the ways a school needs, and that they trust one another completely. When they disagree, and three partners running two schools will

always disagree about something, the mission is the tiebreaker. They do not ask who is right. They ask what changes lives. That single question has settled more between them than any rule ever could, and it is the reason they can stand beside one another, and beside your family, as solid partners with one shared aim.

"We came together as like-minded people who wanted the same thing and trusted one another to build it. Three of us, one mission, no daylight between us. That is what makes us partners, and it is what makes this school what it is." ***Matthew Guse, LainaLee Rambow, and Shannon Guse***

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## Getting Started: Your First Step

If something in these pages resonated with you, the next step is a simple one, and you do not have to take it alone.

Whether you are a parent wondering if this is right for your child, an adult who has thought about starting for years, or a current student who knows a family that needs exactly what you have found here, we would love to hear from you. There is no pressure and no commitment. Just a conversation, and an open door.

You can reach us in whatever way feels easiest. Call or text us, send an email, or scan the code below, and we will help you find the right class and the right time for your family.

Call or text: 757-797-6004

Email: [MGuse@clmava.com](mailto:MGuse@clmava.com)



Come watch a class. Step onto the floor. See for yourself whether the people in this Whitepaper are the people you want standing beside your family. The first step is the hardest one. Everything after it, we walk with you.

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## **Closing: Our Promise to You**

You have now met the three of us. You know what we believe, how the training shows up in every corner of a person's life, and the people who make it all happen. There is only one thing left to say, and it is the most important.

This is our promise to you.

We promise to treat your family the way we would want ours treated. We promise to hold your child to a standard, because we believe in them, and to support them, because we care about them. We promise that what we teach on the mat will matter off it. And we promise to be exactly the people this Whitepaper says we are, not just on the days it is easy, but on the days it is hard.

We make that last promise with our eyes open. We are three real people running two real schools, and we will not always get everything right. What we can promise is that when we fall short, we will own it, fix it, and hold ourselves to the same standard we ask of our students. That is what character looks like in practice. It is not the absence of mistakes. It is what you do about them. We would rather show your family that than pretend to be perfect, because the willingness to keep growing is the single most important thing we hope your child takes from this place.

We cannot promise that the journey will always be comfortable. Growth rarely is. There will be classes your child does not want to attend, plateaus that feel discouraging, and moments when the easy choice is to stop. Those moments are not signs that something is wrong. They are the exact places where the real lessons live, and we will be standing right beside your family through every one of them. Your family will never walk it alone.

The first step is the hardest. We will be right here when you are ready to take it.

**Changing Lives Martial Arts** *Virginia Beach and Chesapeake*