



**BRANDI SUTTON**

is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at St. Barnabas Elementary School in Northfield. She is active in many sports including volleyball, basketball and softball. Brandi is very close to her family and enjoys being with them and her friends. She would like to improve the lives of others by becoming a fitness trainer and/or psychologist.

By definition, the word “intolerance” has a few different meanings. In this case, the definition I will be using is when a person is exhibiting irrationality, hostility and animosity toward those of differing disabilities or various mental disorders. In particular, I will be giving an example of a person that is intolerant to autism. Autism, by definition is a disorder of neural development characterized by impaired social interaction and communication and may include repetitive behavior.

A “real life” example that I will be using is about this little child, Tommy\*, who used to be in my fitness class. Tommy is about eight years old. He is quite slow comprehending information and is mildly autistic. Knowing that Tommy is autistic, the fitness instructor would scream at him for being too slow and would make very insulting remarks that would lower Tommy’s self-esteem. When Tommy would finally do something right, the fitness instructor would not even praise him. If Tommy ever cried, the instructor would call him a baby or a brat and would tell him to sit in the corner. Sadly enough, if Tommy was in the corner crying, the instructor would make fun of him very loudly and would encourage the other children to do the same.

This is only one of the many examples in this world of the unjust treatment to autistic children by intolerant people. The general public has not recognized the seriousness of this disorder and has not been educated on how to properly interact with, or properly educate these children. The public needs to respect autistic children as they do with other children and not make the autistic children feel bad about themselves, but encourage them to grow emotionally.

One of my most important wishes is not only for scientists to find a cure for autism, but a cure for people’s intolerance to disabled individuals throughout the world. Until that time comes, we all need to try to educate ourselves on how to interact with those whom have autistic disabilities. One way to interact would be to find a family with an autistic child and devote some of my time to personally interact with that child on a scheduled basis. We could pick one task, such as reading a book or coloring a picture, and work on it every time we would meet. This would help build the child’s social interaction skills and help to give the child a sense of accomplishment by actually finishing a book or project together, and more importantly, making a new friend.

*\*Name has been changed*