

Student publishes children's book about autism

By J.B. Wogan

In an effort to demystify autism, Briana Pacelli, 18, wrote her first book.

Pacelli, who graduated from Eastlake High School in May, collaborated with her brother Trevor, 15, on the work, entitled "The Kindergarten Adventures of Amazing Grace: What in the World is Autism?"

"I've always enjoyed writing. It's been one of my strengths as far as school subjects go," Briana said.

The book, which also served as Briana's senior project, follows a kindergartener named Grace as she discovers that her classmate Noah has autism. Grace, a first-person protagonist, learns to view Noah's unusual behavior as a distinguishing feature and part of his personality.

About one in 150 Americans, or about .7 percent, has autism.

For the 2008-2009 school year, 147 students in the Issaquah School District are expected to have autism, about 0.9 percent of the district's student population. According to a Dec. 1, 2007 federal report, 279 students in the Lake Washington School District had autism, constituting slightly more than 1 percent of that district's student population.

One of those students is Trevor Pacelli.

"I didn't really comprehend it. I just knew that he acted differently," said Briana, who recalled learning at age 10 that her brother had autism.

As part of her project, Briana spent more than 70 hours researching autism and children's literature.

After drafting the story with pure text, Briana used stick-figure drawings in a storyboard to give Trevor an idea of what she needed as a visual element for the book.

"I'm just naturally good," said Trevor, a lifelong doodler. In all, he illustrated 19 panels using pen and colored pencils. In most cases, Trevor's first and final drafts are the same.

A rising sophomore at Eastlake, Trevor said he spends his free time during the summer playing piano, guitar and Nintendo.

This fall, he will begin high school, while Briana will enter her freshman year at University of Arizona. She plans to study nursing.

She said she hoped the finished product would appeal to audiences in kindergarten and elementary school.

"I noticed growi



Photo by J.B. Wogan

Trevor and Briana Pacelli, 15 and 18 respectively, collaborated on a children's book designed to educate young readers about autism.

didn't really understand much about autism, but I would like to see if they can accept it better," she

While the book is available for

See BOOK, Page 10

Book

Continued from Page 9

purchase — Briana has sold 15 copies — its primary purpose is educational, Briana said. In the future, school libraries and local teachers could use the book to engage students in a discussion about the disorder, she explained.

"Awareness does equal acceptance," said Lynne Banki, Briana's mentor for the project. Banki published a book about

her son Caspian, 14, called "What Autism Means to Me." A hybrid of informational material and workbook pages, the book is now used at Montana State University for students studying special education.

Banki said that Briana's approach to the topic as a first-person account made the project unusual.

"It was a well-thought-out story that would be enjoyed anyway," Banki said. "The younger grades love to have books read to them."

Banki also pointed out that Briana's book can be used to

help autistic children better understand their disorder, too.

"I know that some parents have used my book to teach their kids that they have autism. I could see them doing the same with hers," Banki said.

Trevor said the experience gave him new insights about autism, too.

"I saw how other people see kids with autism, or think of me," he said. "It must be pretty hard to accept kids with autism."

Reporter J.B. Wogan can be reached at 392-6434, ext. 247, or jbwogan@isspress.com.