

# Taekwondo helping student shine

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Winning a two-week pass to a local taekwondo school led to the transformation of Bradley Navaranjan.

He is the recipient of a Yes I Can award from the public and Catholic school boards, in conjunction with the Council for Exceptional Children, York Region Chapter 543.

"No matter which board you work for, we have the best interest of our students at heart," said Mary Garofalo, program consultant, special education at York Catholic District School Board.

The Yes I Can awards "honour children and youth with exceptionalities who shine," according to the Council for Exceptional Children's website.

Bradley, a 13-year-old Grade 8 student at Oscar Peterson Public School, was nominated by a teacher.

"What tremendous growth Bradley has made as a young man living with autism. ... Bradley has gained an understanding of how to control his inner struggles and feelings through martial arts," reads part of the nomination.

Awards were given out during a special ceremony last week in aca-

demics, arts, athletics, school and community activities, self advocacy, technology and transition.

But that is not why Bradley joined Stouffville Taekwondo Karate four years ago. It was because he won two free weeks of lessons through a school fun fair.

He is now a black belt and teaches at the school.

"I'm exceptionally proud of Bradley and his accomplishment and he hasn't let having a condition put a limit on his abilities and goals," said Stouffville Taekwondo Karate instructor Christopher Ridabock Jr.

## AUTISTIC ATHLETES

Bradley's mother, Jill Green, knew something wasn't quite right with her middle child when he started kindergarten. But tests and specialists "couldn't put a finger on it".

A couple of years ago someone finally did. Bradley has asperger syndrome, which is a form of autism.

Bradley suffers from anxiety when he goes into social situations. But through taekwondo, he has learned self control, discipline and self respect, according to his mother.

Bradley was Mr. Ridabock Jr.'s first autistic student. Now he has

four or five.

"I don't know if it's me or the taekwondo. They do very well," he said.

Upon hearing he won a Yes I Can award, Ms Green said Bradley was shocked.

"For him to accomplish something on his own, means a lot to him," she said.

"It's a good source of inspiration. ... Our limits are only set by ourselves," Mr. Ridabock Jr. said.



**BRADLEY NAVARANJAN:** Autistic student receives Yes I Can award from York Region school boards.

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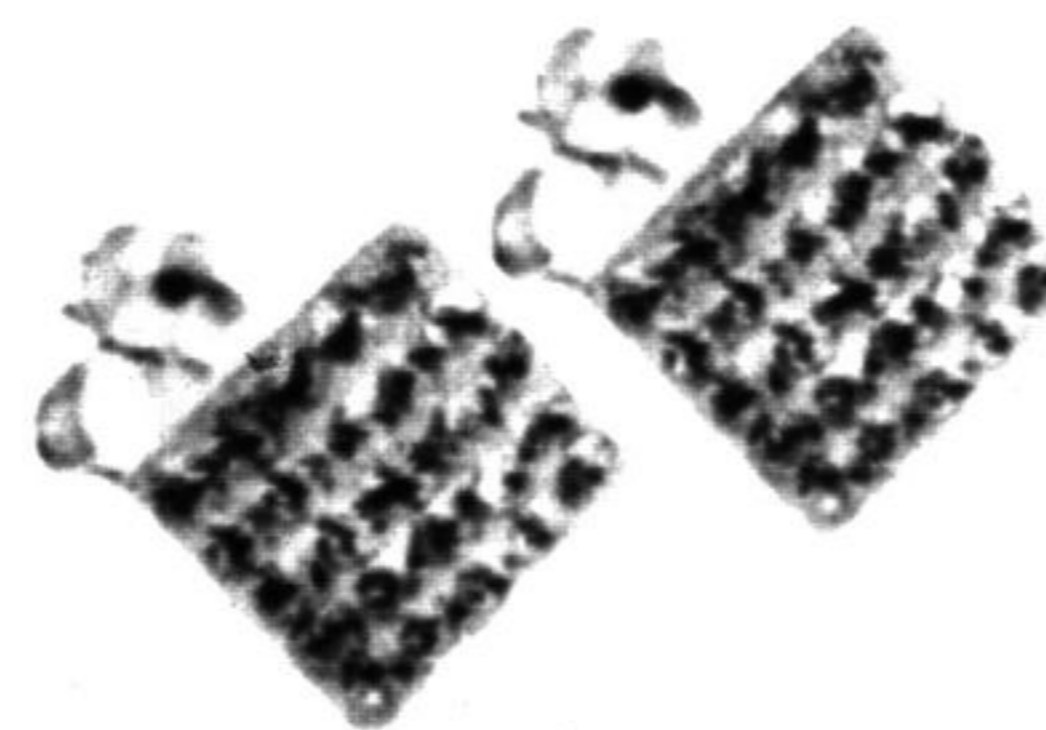


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