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5/6/08

Autism & Tae Kwon Do

Posted: May 6, 2008 09:49 PM EDT



Many parents of autistic children are looking for things their kids can do outside of school, on the weekends, and even with regularly-developing children.

Turns out that Tae Kwon Do is one such activity, and it has benefits far beyond an after-school activity. Cat Greenleaf takes a closer look at a New York woman who's introducing autistic children to that martial art.

John Ordovery, father: "When you first get hit with the diagnosis of autism, your first reaction is panic and fear and blame and denial. You mourn and then you move on."

For John Ordovery & his son Arren, moving on meant moving better.

John Ordovery, father: "One of the things about autism is that it is really a mind-body problem, and things like martial arts teach the connection between mind and body."

Arren began private Tae Kwon Do lessons with Lisa Chin in 2006. His progress inspired her to organize full classes in Brooklyn, which she calls "FirefliesNY".

Lisa Chin, founder, FirefliesNY: "I believe that children with autism have so much potential, and if you can just tap into that potential, they can just light up a room like fireflies in the night."

Chin, a special ed teacher and Tae Kwon Do black belt, says the physical exercises develop strength, flexibility, and coordination. But she brings in volunteers from a local middle school to build socialization.

Lisa Chin, Tae Kwon Do instructor: "They also help make it a more one-to-one ratio and we like to keep it as hands-on as possible."

Nicholas Johnson, high school instructor: "We have fun when we are doing Tae Kwon Do. They enjoy it, I enjoy it."

Suzanne Killian says Tae Kwon Do has changed life for her 5-year-old son, Ryan.

Suzanne Killian, mother: "He smiles every day. He's a joy to be around. He's mine and I'm going to make sure he gets whatever he needs."

Killian pays \$100 for every 45-minute class, and students can come up to three times a week. That might not be enough for some!

Suzanne Killian, mother: "I wish I could move in. I'd be here every day."

I don't know if she's looking for roommates, but "Fireflies" is held in Lisa's apartment.

"Your kitchen has become your living room."

Lisa: "My living room has become a gym."

"And your bedroom?"

Lisa: "Has become my living room and bedroom."

"And you do it because..."

Lisa: "All for the kids and their families."

"And at the end of a 45-minute period, is it worth it?"

Lisa: "Absolutely. Without a doubt."

And what she loses in square footage, she gains back in satisfaction.

Lisa Chin, founder, FirefliesNY: "There are no words to describe what I get out of working with these children. They are a joy to be with."

Lisa is now starting a program where people can sponsor an autistic child by donating money toward their tuition.



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