

Andy Wright

Until the age of 8 years Andy was reliant upon a wheelchair due to athetoid cerebral palsy. When in the house he would crawl around on all fours. Only when he joined the local Scout group and saw the other children running around and playing did he decide to get himself out of the wheelchair and start to walk.

He attended special schools in Henleaze, Bristol and Tonbridge, Kent (where he was educated to GCE O Level standard).

At the age of 17, once he had left the "Spastic Society" boarding school he learnt to drive a car, and this obviously helped getting around. But he spent the 1980's unemployed because he was unable to secure a job. His Job Centre Advisor told him to go home and claim benefits!

During that time he ran a mobile disco but was so determined to get a proper job he set his sights on working as a computer programmer, for which his only experience was self taught on a ZX Spectrum. Yet, despite this lack of knowledge started full time work in 1989. This was the start of an IT career spanning 15 years during which time he worked as an IT technician, field engineer, college course tutor and self-employed home computer repairer.

Following a mugging in 1985 that involved being dragged from his vehicle in broad daylight (and a year of mostly isolation and fear of going out) he took up karate. After 3 years of regular training at a local club he took and passed his 1st Dan Black Belt, with the only modification of syllabus being the exclusion of the stuff he couldn't do. The following year, 1990, he started his own club teaching able-bodied children and adults. For the next 18 years he continued to teach, travel round the world (Russia, USA, Malta, Australia) and grade students – his current level being 5th Dan (2004).

During the late 1990's he trained in holistic health and chi kung (tai chi) and now uses those skills to teach people and groups who fall into the "unhealthy" category, including the clients who use the services provided by his day-job, that of a drug-addiction advisor. As a result of the day job he won the *Tackling Drugs and Changing Lives* Award 2006 for the South West, and subsequently was involved in the making of a DVD video that was shown at the prestigious awards ceremony in London.

Tai Chi For Arthritis training 19-20 April 2008

A report by Andy Wright: "I decided to attend this course following my discussions with the course organiser. Having experienced several (dare I say it) dodgy instructors over the years offering courses that are a waste of time and money, I was willing to keep an open mind about this one. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the Trainer (Lesley) was sincere, knowledgeable and a true tai chi player. The program developed by Doctor Lam was a complete system and for me was something I would use in classes.

With regard to the event, I was happy to start at the back and mingle. I usually find that, due to my condition, trainers and other participants don't really take me seriously. I will say my ability to teach in detail is way above my personal ability to actually perform the moves, so I am usually left to do my own thing. From the very first moment I absorbed the finer points that Lesley was teaching and soon became confident enough to lead the warm up session. I knew a few of the participants because we had started on another training course together, so it was nice to catch up with them.

The group was a mix of ages and abilities. Some taught Extend, one was an aerobic instructor, although I think that I was the only one with a tai chi background.

The first day was physically tough for me with around 6½ hours of being on my feet. This involved repeatedly practising the form, with detailed explanation of each part. Also included were aspects about arthritis, tai chi background and group discussions about setting up classes etc.

The second day saw the participants polishing the form, doing it standing but also chair-based. After lunch there was a dreaded test, but overall the answers were covered during the weekend.

To finish Lesley performed a tai chi form, to music. It was obviously something that she had practised for many hours in order to get to such a high standard. This 'Sun Style' form was used in competition and you could see the origins of the 12 moves we had been learning.

I was so confident with the learning I had done at the weekend, I actually went out on Monday and began to teach it to my new day centre class!"