

# KICKING DOWN THEIR OWN WALLS

## Tae kwon do helps autistic kids cope

BY JOYCE SHELBY

LIKE LOTS of other little Brooklyn boys, Arren Ordover and Ryan Killen are enjoying learning the basics of martial arts.

Every week, the 5-year-olds meet with instructor Lisa Chin, who has a black belt in tae kwon do, to do the blocks, punches and kicks of the Korean sport.

But the sessions offer more than an opportunity to be physically active. Chin is also a special education teacher, and both her young students are on what is known as the autism spectrum.

The developmental disability can affect communication, balance and motor skills, social interactions and play activities, according to the Autism Society of America.

About 1.5 million Americans are on the spectrum, with boys more often affected than girls.

Tae kwon do has been found helpful in improving the children's range of motion and control of movement, as well as their social skills, said Chin, who lives in Windsor Terrace.

"They learn to kick, turn, wait their turn, stand still and work with other children," she said. "It's a great outlet."

There are also benefits for kids like Arren and Ryan, who have limited communication skills, Chin said. Pent-up frustrations or anxieties can be released by punching objects such as a hand-held double shield.

Chin said she saw the effectiveness of the sport while working full time as a teacher. Two years ago, she decided to start FirefliesNY, a program that combines tae kwon do with movement, balance, stretching and breathing exercises, all done to music.

John and Carol Ordover of Bay Ridge said their son's coordination, balance and confidence have all improved since he started lessons 18 months ago.

"Arren can now follow directions better," Carol Ordover said.

"And," John Ordover added, "it has helped him learn to participate in a class. When he moved from one-on-one sessions to a class with other kids, at first he was really jealous. Now, he's gotten used to functioning in a regular class. It was a really good step for him."

Suzanne Killen of Marine Park said her son Ryan's eye contact and focus have improved.

"It's extremely hard to find things for children on the spectrum to do," Killen said. "I wanted him to have his own hobby. But it's hard to find someone like Lisa who is experienced with children on the spectrum and knows how to handle them."

"A child having a bad day, a child having a meltdown — a normal karate instructor might not understand."

*FirefliesNY is for children ranging in age from 3½ to 15. Visit [www.firefliesny.com](http://www.firefliesny.com) for more information about the program or call (718) 355-9480.*



Ryan, 5, and his mom, Suzanne Killen, take a break from tae kwon do at FirefliesNY. At right, instructor Sarina Andino with 5-year-old Arren Ordover. Above, instructor Lisa Chin shows Arren correct kick technique.

Instructor Lisa Chin, who has a black belt in tae kwon do, helps Ryan Killen develop better flexibility.

Photos by Jeff Bachner

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