



Examiner Home

My Examiners

Arts & Entertainment

Bars & Clubs

Business & Finance

Careers & Workplace

Education & Schools

Family & Parenting

Fitness & Weight Loss

Food & Drink

Gadgets & Tech

Games & Hobbies

Health

Home & Living

Neighborhoods

News

Pets

Politics

Recreation

Relationships

Religion & Spirituality

Restaurants

Shopping

Sports

Style & Fashion

Transportation

Travel

Associated Press

Classifieds

Examiners

News By Location

News By Topic

Awesome Teacher Profile: Lisa Chin of FirefliesNY, ABA martial arts instruction for autism treatment



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by Kathleen Byrne, NY School Examiner

1 comment

« Previous

Translated loosely from Korean, Tae Kwon Do means *the art of kicking and punching*, making it, some would say, a particularly inappropriate activity for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) kids.

"Not so," says Lisa Chin, founder of FirefliesNY and a black belt since her teenage years. "Tae Kwon Do teaches respect for others, self-control, discipline, consistency and determination, all areas in which spectrum kids especially need help."



photo: Jeff Bachner

A former middle-school special education teacher, Ms. Chin recognized a growing number of students on the autism spectrum in her classroom. She began to spend her evenings researching the best teaching methods to reach ASD students, and, by applying the research in her classroom, saw immediate results with her ASD students. She started to teach Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) after school as a way to hone her skills even further. Now, she combines her childhood love of Tae Kwon Do with her adult passion for teaching spectrum kids full-time at FirefliesNY, the only martial arts studio that instructs with one-on-one ABA in the New York area, if not the entire country.

Using volunteers as assistants, Ms. Chin is able to give every child in class her undivided attention, making her instruction a true form of ABA learning as well as great physical exercise and socialization therapy.

Ms. Chin has an almost supernatural connection with ASD children. While ASD kids will mostly ignore or express fear and loathing to strangers, Ms. Chin is able to engage them after only a few minutes. She's kind of an autism whisperer. Children who are frequently asked not to return to other group classes because they are too disruptive or need too much individual attention are welcomed at FirefliesNY.

And what about the name *Fireflies*? "ASD children are like fireflies because at first you think they're not there; you can't see them. Then, briefly, their eyes light up, and you can see the person—not the disability. It's my goal to keep those lights burning bright throughout the entire Tae Kwon Do lesson," says Ms. Chin. "And, eventually, to make the light shine with everything they do," she adds.

For an intake evaluation, contact Lisa Chin, (718) 355-9480 or Lisa@FirefliesNY.com. FirefliesNY is located in the Park Slope/Windsor Terrace section of Brooklyn.