

A World-first: Tai Chi Classes for People with Low Vision or No Contrast Vision



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Who are we?

- A consortium of three specialist agencies
- **Age Concern Albury Wodonga Inc.:** a local leader in HACCC and related services for older adults and people in the community seeking to remain independent and connected
- **Vision Australia:** a national leader in services to people living with low vision and vision impairment, with an Albury office
- **Charles Sturt University, Albury Campus:** local university campus with schools of Community Health (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy) and Centre for Inland Health



What is this project about?

We have to remember:

- *Equity* means more than simply *equality*
- *Access* means more than simply having a ramp or a convenient toilet
- *Inclusion* means more than simply saying “Everyone is welcome”

Everybody is entitled to:

- The right to an ordinary life, not defined by disability
- The dignity of risk when exercising choice.



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What is this project about? (cont.)

Background

- High falls risk for people with low vision
- Low confidence of people with low vision
- Other health risks such as diabetes
- High drop-out rate of Tai Chi participants who live with low vision or no contrast vision
- Participants' own words



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Aims of this project

- Safe exercise program of known benefit for falls injury prevention
- Community level courses
- Able to be used where little or no access to therapy or gym services
- No 'disability' or 'falls' tag – so emphasis is **on increased independence**



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Aims of this project (cont.)

- Most importantly, to encourage participants to move into mainstream classes as they are ready



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What is Age Concern's Role?

- Develop the teaching style, together with Vision Australia staff
- Host the course as part of mainstream activities
- Progress participants to mainstream classes
- Teach other instructors how to use this model
- Lead agency for funding coordination and reporting



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What is Vision Australia's role?

- Support instructor and exercise partners in understanding impact of low vision
- Aid in identifying potential participants
- Support participants
- Eventually, to train instructors and exercise partners so the model can be replicated throughout Australia especially in remote communities



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What is Charles Sturt Uni's role?

- Evaluate our model for participant benefit
- Evaluate our model for volunteer benefit
- Evaluate our model for replication and sustainability



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Our Instruction Method

- Our instructor, Susan Stevens, has been teaching Tai Chi for many years.
- We have adapted the class time and teaching pattern for our participants' needs.
- We have also adapted the learning space for their needs.
- More to come in later reports!!



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The Role of Volunteers

- Volunteers with background in Tai Chi or similar exercise
- Trained in Sighted Guide assistance
- Trained in First Aid
- Support both the instructor and the participant
- Are Exercise Partners, not aides or carers
- Aim is for participants to be independent of assistance by end of course



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Progress so far

- Halfway through pilot course
- Still refining instruction method
- Participants have learnt faster than expected
- In participants' own words



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Next Steps

- Complete this course next week
- Collate experiences
- Consolidate after summer break
- Begin first public course during Term 1 2008
- Replicate by mid-year 2008.



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Acknowledgements

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