

Visualising Balance: Tai Chi Classes for People with Low Vision (Part 2)



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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 including adult education for older adults and people in the community, including those with disabilities, 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



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What is this project about?

Our philosophy:

- **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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Aims of this project

- To provide safe exercise programs of known benefit for falls injury prevention
- To provide community level courses that affordable, central and accessible
- To be able to be used where there is little or no access to therapy or gym services
- No 'disability' or 'falls' tag – so emphasis is **on increased independence**
- 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 both in health/wellbeing and in lifestyle choices
- Evaluate our model for volunteer satisfaction
- Evaluate our model for replication and sustainability



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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 – and this has worked as some have found new interests opening to them



Progress so far

- Our philosophy is embodied in every part of this course, from the design stage through to the evaluation.
- Our instructor consulted extensively with the Vision Australia OT and person with low vision who had previously tried mainstream Tai Chi classes.
- From invitation through to enrolment and evaluation each stage includes alternative format documentation and time for consultation and feedback between participants, and instructor.



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Some of what we've learnt:

Of course all the usual principles of adult learning

apply – it is crucial to take time to adapt your instruction style for the needs of each individual. In this case, we allow double class time

Remember that **each learner will perceive your instructions differently**, even if they have the same eye condition or the same measure of functional vision. That's why we adhere to the principles of adult learning and adapt our instruction style

Our system relies on **Exercise Partners** who welcome the participants with low vision, and act as assigned personal tutors when needed. The **Exercise Partners and Instructor are all trained as Sighted Guides** and this has been invaluable in the work. It reassured the participants and encouraged them to be more adventurous than we had anticipated



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Next Steps

- About to start ***Introduction to Tai Chi for People with Low Vision*** course at Vision Australia in March with return students and new enrollees
- CSU to evaluate this course (pilot course evaluated in-house)
- Replicate for training new instructors in this region by mid-year.



Acknowledgements

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