

Special Needs Children Make Strides at Shelby Martial Arts School

Programs have proven beneficial for ADD, ADHD and autistic students.

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Sam Rockman, 10, of Troy, breaks a board at the Shelby Martial Arts Academy.

Shelby Martial Arts Academy, A Shelby Township martial arts school is helping special needs students gain balance, focus, self-esteem, and more skills vital to their development. The Shelby Martial Arts Academy, located on Schoenherr and 23 Mile roads, is home to the Center for Rhythm and Movement, a nonprofit 503(c) martial arts program geared for children with ADD, ADHD, and autism.

Shelby Martial Arts Academy co-owner Richard Bole has operated the Center for the past seven years. He said an active board of parent advisors will soon oversee the nonprofit. Bole started the Center because he recognized the benefits martial arts offer children diagnosed with the conditions listed above. Martial arts connect the mind and body, offering improved motor coordination, inner strength, centering, focus, and movement. It also affords heightened balance and concentration.

Sam Rockman, 10, of Troy, is autistic and has been in the program for more than a year. His mother, Kira, said Sam's grown in many ways since he started studying martial arts. "It's really helped him build up his confidence, self-control, and his attention. It's also made him calmer," she said. "He enjoys going and being around the other kids. They are great role models for him."

Bole estimates that up to one half of the students enrolled at the Shelby Martial Arts Academy have ADD, ADHD or autism. Students and their families come from as far as Detroit to enroll in classes, such as Brain Gym. Offered through the Center for Rhythm and Movement, Brain Gym is a series of 26 basic movements that help the child learn self-control and focus. Bole employs a licensed Brain Gym instructor and private lessons are available.

For the older child, the Academy has a program called Bal-A-Vis-X, which utilizes balance boards, sand bags, and bouncing racquet balls to raise their level of focus tremendously. "The kids have shown improvement in study habits in only a few weeks," Bole said. As far as the martial arts, children study

either Choi Kwang Do or Aikido, both passive, nonaggressive martial arts style offered at the Academy. Bole said once the students are focused, all labels – ADD, ADHD, autistic - are thrown out the window. “You can’t tell which one has ADD or whatever,” he said. “They’ve learned the same focus as the other kids. It’s amazing.”