

# Strength for mind

**When I was a child, my Mum had a part time job at St. Peter's Hospital in Bourne, Lincolnshire. St. Peter's was one of the old fashioned style of mental health hospitals and is no longer there, having been demolished in 2001.**

**Mum would take me along to events such as summer garden fetes at the hospital where I would meet her workmates and some of the patients. At the time, I didn't really think much about it. We were just going out to try and win a cake on the tombola stall.**

**Whether she realised it or not, I will never know but Mum was giving me a very useful life skill. By mixing and making friends with what we would now classify as people with learning needs I was quietly becoming accustomed to them' writes Ray Pawlett**

**M**y tai chi journey began in 1991 when I went to university at Nottingham Trent to study engineering. I have been fortunate to have studied extensively with (in chronological order), Shelagh Granpierre, Chris Pei and Joe Lok. There are a few other big names in my tai chi history but these are the people I have done the most work with.

My tai chi style is the Yang style from the lineage of Yang Zhen Ji. My major qigong style is *phoenix in graceful clouds of blessings*, taught to me by the originator, master Joe Lok.

In 2011, I made the break and decided to give up my engineering career and created a small business that I call Ki-Ways. I teach tai chi, qigong, treatment work, meditation, energy, connection with nature and give shiatsu healing treatments as my full time job.

Very early in my self employed career, I was given the opportunity to teach tai chi to a group of people with learning needs. The experiences given to me by my mother and my world of tai chi became married together and the union has been a happy one since that day.

The world is a different place to what it was a few years

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ago. Before lockdown, we had a healthy number of people coming but somehow the numbers didn't really recover after lockdown.

This kind of work is important to me as it gives benefit to many people: the service users, their carers and their families. So I wanted to keep it going even though it had



**Ray Pawlett's students**

become financially difficult.

In the TCUGB magazine, I saw mention of the Gerda Geddes Fund. This fund is to help disadvantaged people to have access to tai chi coaching.

I contacted the Tai Chi Union with my idea and they liked it. There was a simple application form for the grant which I filled in and sent to them. Our special class was then discussed at their board meeting.

They unanimously agreed that the cause was a good one and that the Tai Chi Union would award our group the maximum grant possible to pay the rent for the hire of the room. I felt that it is a little bit extra special as this is the first such grant to ever approved.

This means that for around seven months, the rent for



**“I also have a lot of experience in coaching tai chi for people with dementia” - Ray Pawlett**

the Learning Support Tai Chi Group is covered. I can now confidently go out and recruit new members to the group, safe in the knowledge that the group is stable and that we will not have to stop running it.

I am not a professional carer, so if a person needs that sort of help, then a carer must come with them. Other than that, there are no real restrictions on people joining the group.

I also have a lot of experience in coaching tai chi for people with dementia. From the outside, it could look similar and actually much of the content is similar. However the delivery is completely different. It is a great example of how coaches need to adapt to their group.

When coaching people with learning needs, your empathy is what will connect you to the participants. Some of the clients will be non-verbal. This really forces you to connect to them empathetically. The ability to connect deeply on this level has become a cornerstone for my work and I think those who helped me to hone the skill.

I believe that everyone has huge potential within them. We may not ever understand what that potential truly is, but it is there. Even with the most cognitively challenged people, this is also true.

If we can truly work from our hearts, then we can speak to that potential and not even need to know where it may or may not lead. This becomes empowering for the client on all levels.

I would like to share a little technique with you. Many people in the world of qigong know about the inner smile. It is easy to look up if you don't.

Sometimes, I come across people who have become very confused and distressed. I hold their hand, placing a little thumb pressure to the centre of the palm. This point connects energetically to their hearts through the pericardium channel. Then create an inner smile from your heart and smile with your face.

You will soon see the distressed person look up at you and smile. Stay with it for a while and let them find their new emotional state.

My experience is that the professional carer with that person will quickly say something like "Wow, he/she really likes you! He/she has been upset all day and you have cheered them up."



**Ray Pawlett and a pawful friend**

I quietly smile to myself and know what has really happened. 🇨🇦