

Documentary, panel to focus on families and autism

By Justin Much

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Anyone who has ever received a massage is familiar with the sensation.

Reason might indicate that a practice that stimulates the senses could provide benefits to someone handicapped by sensory deprivation.

But the connection between autism treatment and massage is not a well-known one. Mid-Willamette Valley physician Louisa Silva hopes to change that through her Qigong Sensory Training Institute.

That will be the focus of "Helping Families with Autism: Qigong Massage," which will present a documentary film that illustrates research in the field conducted through Western Oregon University's Teaching Research Institute. The film and a discussion panel will be at 2 p.m. Saturday at WOU.

Families affected by autism and others interested in the condition are welcome to attend.

Oregon Department of Education data from December cited a total of 1,608 individuals in Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties listed as Special Education Students with the Primary Disability of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Ambiguity about clinical approaches to autism involving massage may be culturally rooted. Silva intends to provide some enlightenment.

Silva received her medical degree from UCLA in 1979. As a family physician, she began to examine alternatives to conventional Western medical applications. She studied Chinese medicine through 1990 and has spent decades seeking methods to integrate Western and Chinese approaches to medicine.

One of her goals is to provide noninvasive, gentle treatment that is readily accessible to families.

Silva was a point person on a study done through WOU's Teaching Research Institute along with researchers from Legacy Emmanuel Children's Hospital in Portland.

If you go

What: "Helping Families with Autism: Qigong massage," a documentary film directed by Donna Read

When: 2 p.m. Saturday; Question and answer panel will take place from 3 to 4 p.m.

Where: Western Oregon University's Werner University Center, Pacific Room, 345 N. Monmouth Ave., Monmouth

Call: (503) 838-8163

ONLINE: www.wou.edu

About QSTI: www.qsti.org

"We did a randomized control study and published it in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy," Silva said. "It demonstrated that the kids receiving (Qigong therapy) responded better afterwards; their behavior improved, they were calmer with less tantrums. They were more relaxed, ate better, slept better and responded better socially."

Silva looks forward to sharing these findings, especially with parents of children working through autism.

"The premise of the research is that part of what is holding these children back is that their senses are not working properly," Silva said, noting that blood circulation and the energy flow through the body are a part of that.

"One of the first things that happens quickly with massage is (autistic children) will make eye contact," she added. "That's an obvious step in the right direction."

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