

A gentle art for kids



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AIKIDO: Riai Aikido instructor Tanya Trower and student Oscar Poll, 8, demonstrate the sumi otoshi move. This is about getting one's partner off balance.

Tucked away in Eden Terrace is a peaceful room complete with muted tones and potted lilies – it's the Riai Aikido Learning Centre.

The facility, known as a dojo, echoes the principles behind aikido.

It is a powerful yet gentle martial art which employs low impact flowing movements to neutralise attacks and is ideal for children because size and strength don't matter.

The venue is now gearing up for a free all-day workshop next week to introduce people to the sport.

Instructor Tanya Trower is known as the sensei and says aikido can help children respond positively to emotionally charged situations like school bullying.

She also believes it aids character development and helps with social skills.

Ms Trower says class participants initially will line up in order and bow to the late Japanese aikido master Morihei Ueshiba whose picture hangs at one end of the room.

Mr Ueshiba died in 1969 and is credited with the development of the sport.

"The master was at his peak in his 80s before he died," Ms Trower says.

"It doesn't rely on strength – it's about the use of energy."

Ms Trower took up the practice eight years ago while on the hunt for a form of self-defence.

"It's very different from other martial arts.

"It's about taking your opponent's energy and moving it back towards them."

A person can rise up the ranks and gain different coloured belts depending on ability.

Aikido students may eventually use weapons but Ms Trower says this is something that comes with maturity.

"It's a really popular art internationally."

Eight year-old Oscar Poll has just started aikido and is enjoying the challenge.

"It's good that it's not violent. There's lots of rolls involved," he says.

Oscar, who attends Bayfield Primary, has learned moves which include throwing your partner off balance, grounding your weight to stop yourself being knocked down and rolling in the correct style as preparation for when you do fall in exercises.

His mother Tanya says he's had a lot of fun practising his new moves at home and tries out techniques on family members.

"It's very peaceful," she says.

Waterview resident Jett Wheeler, 10, has been practising aikido for two years and has no intention of giving it up.

"I'm going to keep going till I get my black belt. Until I'm 53 years old," he says.

The free children's workshop will take place at the Riai Aikido Learning Centre, 38 Monmouth St, Eden Terrace (upstairs), on January 26 from 10am to 2.30pm.

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