

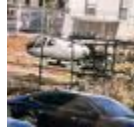
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NEW YORK

Yoga for homeless as instructor lends her talents to those down on luck

By **RICHARD VANDERFORD**
DAILY NEWS WRITER | DEC 22, 2008



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Yoga instructor Karen Nourizadeh goes through stress-relieving positions for a group of homeless people on Monday. (Mendez for News)

They don't have a home, but they have an "Om."

A group of homeless people came in off the cold [Manhattan](#) streets Monday to feed their souls with a yoga class at an East Side shelter.

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Wearing tattered clothes and tired expressions, the destitute were given a chance to practice yoga and try to center their topsy-turvy lives.

"I really want them to take all that pressure and stress and throw it out the window," said [Karen Nourizadeh](#), who teaches the weekly yoga class at the [Mainchance Drop-in Center](#) on 120 E. 32nd St.

Nourizadeh, who owns a yoga studio on the upper East Side, volunteers her services every Monday at the center from 2 to 3 p.m.

"I want to do yoga for people who really need it," Nourizadeh said.

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Nourizadeh led the class through a series of basic yoga exercises to limber them up and relax their minds.

Her homeless students appeared apprehensive and some were reluctant to remove their shoes as the session of muscle stretching poses started. But by the end of the class, the five participants were peacefully chanting "Om" and most said they felt a calmness coursing through their weary bones.

"It was great," said a 29-year-old homeless man named Steve, who because of "personal problems" has been on the streets since October.

"I'm not feeling as tense as I was," said Steve. "Anything you're thinking about just leaves at that moment. You just relax."

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Another student named Frank said it was the third time he has taken Nourizadeh's class.

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"It's hard to describe," said Frank, who stays at the drop-in center's shelter at night. "It's a relaxing exercise."

Frank said he's been taking computer networking classes with a goal of trying to get off the streets and insists that yoga "encourages me to focus."

"I feel so energetic right now and more confident," said Frank following the class.

[Maura Cook](#), a volunteer coordinator at the center, said homeless outreach workers have been spreading the word about the classes, which have drawn 15 to 20 participants.

"They've been through a lot," Cook said of the people who have taken the class. "They don't really have the chance to exercise. Having someone like Karen come in and teach them absolutely means the world to them."

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