

community



do-gooders

The Karma Krew inspires community involvement.

AVRIL BRIGHT OF Boulder, Colorado, considers herself a compassionate person. But she admits that until a while ago, she had done little to channel that empathy into action in her own community. Then she discovered Karma Krew—a group

determined to open hearts and transform lives through karma yoga, or service—and all that changed. “It really challenged me to step outside myself,” Bright says. On one Karma Krew retreat, she helped paint a shelter for abused children. Afterward, she didn’t feel right leaving for good; she found she wanted to form a deeper connection with the kids. “The night after the retreat, I couldn’t sleep,” she says. “The next morning I called the shelter and started volunteering there on my own.”

Since 2006 Karma Krew has mobilized yogis around the country to do work in their communities. Local “krews” have created care packages for members of Alzheimer’s caregiver support groups and planted oak trees, among other things. The organization also sells “Do Good Things” cards, which encourage random acts of altruism. The idea, says cofounder Scott Feinberg, is to insert some kindness for its own sake into a busy, stressful world.

Feinberg and a fellow yoga teacher, Amy Lombardo, started Karma Krew after taking a group of yogis on a retreat to do karma yoga in post-Katrina New Orleans. Today there are krews in nine different cities: Boulder; Columbus, Ohio; New York City;

The Stuart, Florida, krew cleans up a group home for the developmentally challenged.

Northampton, Massachusetts; Philadelphia; Phoenix; Point Pleasant, New Jersey; and Stuart and Fort Myers, Florida.

Each month Lombardo (who lives in New York) and Feinberg (who resides in Florida) choose a particular theme, such as caregiving or environmental preservation. Then krew chiefs decide how to implement that theme based on each community's needs. That might mean working with an afterschool tutoring program, for example, when the theme is supporting schools. Because each locale is unique, Feinberg says, krew chiefs have complete latitude to decide for themselves how they can best help. Chiefs—usually yoga teachers but sometimes students—bring together yogis from local studios for the three- to four-hour working retreats, which combine asana with the various service projects.

Karma Krew's national support system takes much of the guesswork out of planning community activism. Krew

TAKE ACTION

To learn more about joining an established Karma Krew or starting one in your community, check out karmakrew.org.

chiefs have regular conference calls with Feinberg and Lombardo to share their successes and challenges, and the group gives suggestions to the chiefs for making their krews successful.

For her part, Avril Bright has gone from krew member to founding chief of the Boulder group. “It turns your orbit around and sets you on another trajectory,” she says of the volunteer experience. “Community-service work travels from the fingers back to the heart.” HEATHER BOERNER