



There's a Better Way Program

New Mexico, United States

A direct employment and social service program that employed people experiencing homelessness in city cleanup and beautification projects

Summary

There's a Better Way provided employment and support services for people experiencing homelessness in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. The program was launched by the mayor in May 2015, and led by Hope Works, a nonprofit organization working to end homelessness (1). The program was a collaboration between Hope Works, philanthropy, and the municipality. Transportation is provided to job sites where participants work under the supervision of the City of Albuquerque Solid Waste Department. Participants were paid at the end of each workday, and offered additional resources (2).

Rationale

Improve lives of those experiencing homelessness by providing an avenue for participation in economic activity, provide new outlets for philanthropic funds for improved social outcomes, and engage with people experiencing homelessness in a non-emergency setting.

Defining Principles

Homelessness and unemployment are interconnected and better addressed in concert, and everyone is employable.

Dates of Operation

September 2015 - 2019.

Number of Program Participants

6,666 jobs, 1,575 unduplicated people worked in this program (3).

Criteria for Participation

Persons experiencing homelessness or who were panhandling.

Pay and Benefits

USD \$9 an hour (\$0.25 more than New Mexico's minimum wage at the time) (4).



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Financing

Philanthropic donations through HopeWorks non-profit in addition to the municipality (5).

Implementation

HopeWorks' There's a Better Way Program Van provided transportation to worksites where participants completed a day of work under the supervision of the municipal sanitation department.

Types of Work

City cleanup efforts, beautification, and landscaping.

Notable Features

Employment and support services for people experiencing homelessness - 1,575 unduplicated people worked in this program - 422 workers pursued permanent employment information from HopeWorks St. Martin's employment services. 76 of those workers gained permanent employment positions, 355 received mental health and/or substance abuse services, and 21 households were been placed into stable housing (6).

Challenges

Investigations found that the program was picking and choosing repeat participants rather than following the pre-arranged pickup schedule, meaning the program was no longer reaching prospective workers. Payment was distributed by cash which led to concerns about corruption. This contributed to the end of the funding and operation of the program by local stakeholders (7).



ECONOMIC
DEMOCRACY
INITIATIVE

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Citations

- (1) HopeWorks New Mexico. About. <https://hopeworksnm.org/about/>
- (2) Mayor Tim Keller's office. (2018). City Program Provides Dignity and Jobs to the Homeless — City of Albuquerque. <https://www.cabq.gov/mayor/news/city-program-provides-dignity-and-jobs-to-the-homeless>
- (3) Mayor Tim Keller's office. (2018). City Program Provides Dignity and Jobs to the Homeless — City of Albuquerque.
- (4) Wogan, J.B. (2015). Albuquerque Gives Panhandlers Day Jobs, Not Tickets. <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-albuquerque-gives-panhandlers-jobs-not-tickets.html>
- (5) Wogan, J.B. (2015). Albuquerque Gives Panhandlers Day Jobs, Not Tickets.
- (6) Mayor Tim Keller's office. (2018). City Program Provides Dignity and Jobs to the Homeless — City of Albuquerque.
- (7) Washington, Francesca. (November 11, 2019). Inspector General: Albuquerque homeless work program not reaching full potential. KRQE News. <https://www.krqe.com/news/albuquerque-metro/inspector-general-better-way-program-not-reaching-full-potential/>



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