

Day Jobs for Pan Handlers by Joseph Darius Jaafari

Coming up with a unique, innovative way to solve a problem is great, but sometimes borrowing an existing idea is just as good.

The city of Tulsa, Okla., is looking to earmark \$25,000 to fund a program that will combat panhandling by offering cleanup jobs and social services to people on the streets. It got the idea from a neighbor to the west: Albuquerque, N.M.

“Certainly, we’re not trying to reinvent the wheel. We are shamelessly stealing the idea,” says Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum, a republican who was elected last December.

Tulsa’s version is a carbon copy of the Albuquerque program — even taking its name, “There’s A Better Way.” That city’s initiative began in 2015 and allocated \$50,000 from the annual budget to hire 10 to 12 day laborers twice a week. They were paid nine dollars an hour for their work and given access to social service workers who could help them find more permanent employment.

The program achieved such wide success that its funding has been increased by nearly 500 percent.

With just under 400,000 residents, Tulsa has a significant homeless population. In 2016, between 6,000 and 7,000 residents lived on the streets. That number, while small in comparison to homeless populations in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, is noticeable in medium-sized Tulsa.

Former panhandlers work as day laborers as part of the “There’s A Better Way” program in Albuquerque. Photo courtesy of There’s A Better Way

The visibility of panhandlers is worrisome to those in Tulsa’s business districts, says Bynum, and city residents want change. After Bynum’s election, his social media accounts were flooded with a Washington Post article about Albuquerque’s initiative.

Prior to adopting the Better Way program, Tulsa had proposed limiting panhandling by requiring those on the streets to apply for a license. Failure to do so or panhandle in a prohibited area would result in a fine.

But Bynum says that punitive measures wouldn’t address the root of why people panhandle.

Officials in Dallas and Portland, Maine, also have plans to implement There’s A Better Way

in their cities.

Read

more: <http://nationswell.com/tulsa-better-way-day-jobs-panhandlers/#ixzz4jZfxmOcE>