



California city pays its homeless to clean up encampments

BY LEXI LONAS - 04/10/21 11:21 AM EDT

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A city in California is paying its homeless population in gift cards to grocery stores for cleaning up their encampments.

Elk Grove launched the program funded by The Cares Act and the U.S. Department of Housing And Urban Development to address complaints of trash in the city and to form better relationships with the homeless population, CBS Sacramento [reported](#).

"We got together to talk about homelessness, and from my prospective I wanted to build better relationships with people who were experience homelessness, and he wanted to address some of the complaints that come to his officers," Sarah Bontrager, the city's housing and public services manager, [told](#) CNN, referring to one of the city's police sergeants.

Officers give the homeless trash bags and stop by every two weeks to pick them up. A homeless person can earn up to a \$20 grocery store gift card if they have their trash bag filled up.

The gift card allows them to buy anything at a grocery store besides alcohol and cigarettes. Bontrager said many of the homeless are using the gift cards for food and hygiene products.

The program is also saving the city thousands of dollars.

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“We’d go there, it would just be a massive mess, we’d spend hours just cleaning and cleaning, but now we go there and their bags are ready,” Elk Grove Police Department Homeless Outreach Officer Jennifer McCue said.

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“The cost of running this program for over a year has been under \$10,000, when we might have run through that in one month previously just doing the regular cleanups,” Bontrager said

Bontrager said the homeless are grateful to be able to go to the store to pick out what they want and for the opportunity to make money while cleaning up the city.

“Just because I’m homeless doesn’t mean I don’t care,” Ashley Ross, a homeless resident in the city, told the local outlet.

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