



How to Give Responsibly: Vouchers for the homeless

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Many of us experience anxiety, guilt and even irritation sitting at the traffic lights on a wet winter day when a pleading face peers in our window, appealing for small change.

You may search for small change and as you hand over a few coins, wonder if the money will be used for food or alcohol. Is there a better way to help?

While giving money may ease your conscious, there is a danger that this type of assistance causes more harm than good. The City of Cape Town runs a “Responsible Giving” campaign which it has developed through the Social Development wing of the City Improvement District. They aim to educate the public that giving money directly to people begging on the streets often fuels addiction. Money is frequently used to purchase drugs or alcohol, rather than food. On their website they suggest a number of ways to donate to partner NGO’s.

<http://www.giveresponsibly.co.za>

Giving money is also not a long term solution, it will not change the circumstances of the person begging. Tomorrow they will need to resort to begging again. With over 7,500 homeless people sleeping rough in Cape Town and growing numbers, there is an urgent need for better solutions.

Instead of giving money, or even clothing and food directly to an individual, several organizations in Cape Town sell vouchers to the public. Vouchers are then given to people in need who can redeem them for food, clothing or shelter, and most importantly they often put the homeless person in touch with support services.

In giving a voucher to a person at your gate it is often good to create an opportunity for them to earn it. For example, you could ask them to sweep your driveway or pick up litter in the street. In this way we correct the idea of entitlement and instill the idea that there is reward for work.

- U-turn Homeless Ministries vouchers entitles the homeless person to a meal or an item of clothing at U-turn's drop-in Service Centre for the homeless located behind Stadium on Main in Claremont.

The U-turn Service Centre is not just a soup kitchen and clothing depot it is often the first contact point on a journey out of homelessness. U-turn offers a phased programme for a pathway out of homelessness including group therapy, drug and alcohol rehabilitation support, ongoing occupational therapy and skills development. For U-turn the start of that difficult journey begins when a homeless person arrives to redeem their voucher for food or clothing.

Find out more: Homeless.org.za/get-involved/#vouchers

U-turn is a Christian faith based organization which seeks to assist the homeless physically, emotionally and spiritually. Their programme is not a quick fix and for many it takes around two years to journey through the different phases. During that time they are supported and trained as well as receiving work experience in our six charity shops. Bible study prayer and counselling are important components of this programme.

- The Carpenters shop in city center offers ablution and washing facilities for the homeless, run a monthly clinic and provide skills development programs. Each time a homeless person accesses these services they are given a token for a meal at The Service Dining Rooms. The public can purchase tokens at a cost of R1 each from The Service Dining Rooms. These can then be given to those in need.
Find out more: <http://thecarpentersshop.org.za> | <http://servicediningrooms.org.za/>
- Street Smart South Africa raises funds for street children's education, skills training and family reunification programmes. They do this in partnership with a number of restaurants in Cape Town. By voluntarily adding an additional amount to the bill at these establishments the general public assist them with these necessary funds.
Find out more: <http://www.streetSMARTSA.co.za>

For many homeless people, redeeming a voucher is the first step in a journey to turn their lives around. The voucher not only satisfies a person's need for food, clothing or a safe place to sleep, generally they also put the person in touch with support or rehabilitation services.

Although it is not a quick fix, vouchers can change a life. The process starts with our community collectively agreeing to "give responsibly".