

How Much Do 'Signers' Actually Make?

It's a dilemma faced by many of us when pulling up to the light at an off-ramp: Do we or do we not give money to the person with a sign?

For some, it's a commendable act of charity to give the professedly homeless or down-on-their-luck person some money, no judgments or questions asked.

Others, however, hesitate or refuse because they're in the dark about the person's actual financial situation. Or they feel the person should just get a job. Moreover, they also have a sneaking suspicion that the act of begging is already pretty lucrative for the individual.

To shed a little light on this latter issue of how much money "signers" (that's what they call themselves) make, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* recently interviewed some who situate themselves off one of the major freeways in the area. (The video appears below.)

Probably to the surprise of many, the signers they interviewed emphasized that “flying a sign” asking for money was “hard work” and a legitimate job.

One young man—whose earnings record is \$80 in an hour—said the following:

“I understand [that] money isn’t made to be given away; it’s made to be earned. But people think [“signing”] ain’t a job flying a sign—it’s hard work. We stand on our two feet all day long.”

And here’s from a young woman interviewed for the video:

“Sometimes they tell me to get a job or something like that, but this is a job. This is my part-time job, you know. We make more money than a person going to a job—in an hour. In a minute we can make nine dollars. You know, somebody can give us five [dollars] like right when we step out...”

When I’m out here I can really earn like \$20 to \$100 in the [span] of like two hours or an hour-and-a-half. Your first car, maybe you can get like \$20—it just depends. It only takes one person...”

Another young man bragged about his record of making \$500 total from five cars in a row.

As you might expect, it’s difficult to obtain precise figures how much signers make each day. Most stay out only long enough to make their target goal for what they want to purchase. Interviews for a [story](#) out of Fort Worth, Texas, yielded an average of \$30 for about 20 minutes to 2-3 hours of “flying”. A [story in the Tampa Bay Times](#)—which detailed the various strategies used by signers—puts the daily average at somewhere

between \$60 and \$100. The results of a 2002 study out of Toronto seem to support these figures. [The study](#) found that the average person holding a sign on an off-ramp probably collects about as much as someone making minimum wage or just above.

Should that fact incline people not to give to them? Or, is it best to assume that their circumstances prevent them from getting a wage-earning job... or to not assume anything at all?