

"HOMELESS HOTSPOT" PLANS AXED



The controversy and the moral storm of outrage, that followed in the wake of the bizarre plan, by a New York advertising agency, to use homeless people as moving Wi-Fi hotspots, has forced the agency to shelve their plan. After an experimental trial in Austin, Texas, the agency had hoped to try their project in New York, but had to put a stop to their ambitious but misplaced plans, when city officials and homeless-rights advocates tore them apart. A little chastened and probably surprised by the outcry, Emma Cookson, chairman of the agency said, "We have no definite, specific future plans yet, in New York City or elsewhere. This was an initial trial program. "We are now listening carefully to the high level of feedback, trying to learn and respond, and we will then consider what is appropriate to do next." The company had planned to provide internet via a MiFi device planted on a living person, to conference goers. This would cost the around \$2 per 15 minutes of usage. Even though the agency argues that all the proceeds would go to the 'homeless people' for whom the idea was conceived as an altruist measure, the public was disbelieving and labeled the idea "preposterous and inhuman." The agency continues to insist, that it was totally altruist in nature and there was no marketing or selling involved and it was a "genuine attempt to trial a digital version of the homeless news vendor model, and to encourage debate and hopefully lead at some point, once modified, to a superior version of the scheme." The main beneficiaries of the scheme, the Front Steps, which cares for the homeless, were disappointed that the plan was axed. Mitchell Gibbs, director of development and communications at Front Steps, said that the shelter's participants roundly enjoyed the experience. "Everybody was educated and aware about the process," she said "Everybody was excited by the opportunity to make some money." "We've had more community conversations about homelessness, affordable housing, employment opportunities and shelters than we've had in I can't tell you when," said Gibbs. "We count that as a win." Whatever, the future holds for the scheme, there is no doubt that it has brought the plight of the homeless into the open and encouraged debate about their plight and how to remedy their situation. At least for this, the much maligned and slandered agency needs to be applauded.