GUESS WHO? HOW DIGITAL ID IS CHANGING CIVIC SPACE

Digital ID Scenario 2: Electronic Food Vouchers

Heart(h) is a nonprofit organization that caters to the homeless population in the city metropolis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have partnered with global company, Bachelorcard, to provide homeless individuals with e-vouchers for food purchases. The aim is to reduce the burden being placed on local soup kitchens and help support local businesses in the process.

The e-vouchers are issued via text: a unique code is sent to an individual's cell phone amounting to a set cash amount per week. The code is redeemable for food rations at any of the 46 partnering grocery stores, small food markets, and food banks around the city.

Trina, an outreach officer, is performing her daily check-in with local business partners. While conducting her on-site visits, she becomes aware of an alarming trend among small food markets in one of the neighborhoods: single patrons are trying to redeem multiple coupons per transaction, sometimes totaling nearly 500 USD.

Trina brings the trend to her boss's attention. After making inquiries with shopkeepers, trusted community residents, and two community leaders, the Heart(h) team discovers that the vouchers are being traded, bartered, and stolen from their intended recipients. One resident confirms that vouchers are being exchanged for—among other things—drugs, clothes, or protection. She also notes there has been an uptick in stolen phones. One shopkeeper notes that some of his most loyal customers have stopped coming in because they have neither cash nor vouchers. He's also had trouble with the electronic voucher reader (also provided by Bachelorcard) which is prone to not registering voucher transactions unless there is an accompanying credit card purchase. Because the information linking a voucher to a specific person is invisible to the merchant and the user, there's no safe way for the merchant or individuals to try to stand up to people with multiple vouchers worth of credit.

Prompts:

1. What is this system intended to do?
2. Who benefits?
3. Who is being harmed?
4. What other approaches might be preferred?