

IT-company funding an incubator programme for assistive technology start-ups

INDIA/MPHASIS, LTD. – BIRAC-SOCIAL IMPACT INVESTING IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

In 2019 Mphasis, a major IT provider based in Bengaluru, India, teamed up with Social Alpha, an investing company for start-ups, to create a joint programme. Fourteen start-ups working on assistive technologies and innovative solutions for persons with disabilities, such as a Braille lab and an electric wheelchair for Indian terrain, were selected. Each of the 14 received free incubation support, direct funding by Mphasis, and mentorship. Mphasis invested approximately \$350,000 in this programme.

Problem targeted

India lacks a vibrant market of assistive technologies and funding support for early-stage technologies.

Solution, innovation, and impact

“BIRAC-Social Alpha Quest for Assistive Technologies – supported by Mphasis” is the full name of the incubator programme, where Mphasis has teamed up with Social Alpha, a start-up financier, and BIRAC, a publicly funded research centre. The Quest chose 14 participants from over 100 applications based on their (1) business model, (2) innovation, (3) product-market fit, (4) socio-economic impact, and (5) focus on accessibility. In addition to grant funding from Mphasis, each start-up has been offered free incubation support from Social Alpha for the next two years, and each is also supported by a portfolio manager who provides support for strategy and execution.

“This fund has been critical to provide an affordable solution and to scale up despite the pandemic.”

Aman Srivastav, Founder, Thinkerbell Labs

The programme has helped the start-ups to connect with manufacturers and distribution channels, as well as with hospitals for clinical trials; and to highlight products through physical events and digital promotions. It also provided grants to facilitate their journey to market.

The selected innovations include slip-proof crutches, electric wheelchairs for Indian terrain, and a tool for screening autism, among others.



This rotating car seat is one of the assistive technology innovations Mphasis has invested in.

Outlook, transferability, and funding

Mphasis supported Social Alpha with \$337,250, with each winning innovation receiving a grant of up to \$27,000.

Many products have already found distributors, onboarded new partners, won awards, and entered the market with a large customer base. Over the next few years Mphasis will continue to support similar programmes, such as the Social Alpha Assistive Technology Fellowship programme, a course designed for innovators to learn accessibility, inclusion, and Universal Design.

FACTS & FIGURES

Start: 2019

- 14 start-ups have been selected and received grants of up to \$27,000.
- Ten companies have already rolled out their products to end users.
- *A practice from the Business Sector.*



Ms. Sarojini Subbiah

sarojini.s@mphasis.com – www.mphasis.com