

Awareness Conclave on Assistive Technologies for Persons with Disabilities

Including Corporates, Investors, Government Officials, NGOs, Special Schools, Disability Support Groups of Educational Institutions and Persons with Disabilities

Date: 30th Jan 2024 Timing: 9:30 am to 6:00 pm

Supported by DXC Technology

Organized by: Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled,

Venue: Hotel Holiday Inn, Andheri East Mumbai

Introduction

Advancement of science and technology across the globe has significantly contributed to promoting digital and innovative assistive technology (AT) across sectors such as health, education, banking, finance, agriculture, industry, hospitality, retail and other aspects of our daily living. It is increasingly becoming important that persons with disabilities are aware of such technologies and make appropriate adoption choices to suit their specific needs. It is also critical that persons with disabilities get more actively involved in the entire design and development process so these technologies better reflect their desires and aspirations. This is especially important as the present focus of digital and technological inclusion initiatives seems to completely or partially ignore the specific needs of access for most categories of disabilities. Moreover, affordability continues to be a concern for most persons with disabilities. There is a need for governments, corporates and other supply-side stakeholders to forge and sustain long-term partnership with Disability NGOs and DPOs (Disabled People's Organizations) to ensure that technology is meaningful for persons with disabilities, actually reaches them and services their needs.

Objectives of the AT Awareness Conclave 2024

The proposed one-day AT Conclave seeks to bring the combined voices of persons with disabilities to the centre-stage. We expect a large participation from persons with disabilities, care givers, special schools, DPOs and disability NGOs in this Conclave, which will also bring together technology start-ups, social/impact investors, corporates, government, academia and employers of persons with disabilities. The conversations, discussions and demonstrations during the Conclave will focus on developing better insights into the contextual realities of persons with disabilities as well as their specific needs with respect to appropriate AT designs and delivery mechanisms. We also expect that the Conclave will serve as an effective platform for other key stakeholders to develop a better understanding of mutual concerns and capabilities in order to service the needs of persons with disabilities in a financially viable and sustainable manner.

More specifically, at/through the Conclave, we seek to:

1. Invite persons with disabilities, care givers, disability NGOs, DPOs, government officials and policy makers to orient them to various ATs available for diverse types of disabilities.
2. Sensitize the special schools for students with disabilities to enable them to explore better incorporation of ATs in the learning system.
3. Present concerns of the user communities to technology experts to enable them design appropriate ATs for the specific needs of persons with disabilities. This is expected to happen by identifying problems of specific types and degree of disabilities through focus group discussions (such as, spinal injury group, people/children with spastic conditions, CP and other rare diseases such as muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis etc.)

4. Influence policy makers, employers and investors to invest on AT and facilitate organizations/start-ups to invent/manufacture appropriate technologies at affordable cost.

Expected number of participants: 150 participants - to include representatives from persons with disabilities, care givers, disability NGOs, DPOs, technology start-ups, product manufacturers and distributors, social/impact investors, government departments, PSUs corporates and employers, media. We expect a participation of 150 stakeholders, including persons with disabilities. We also expect participation from 25 special schools for children with disability as well as 15-20 AT start-ups. We also expect leading manufacturers of AT products to be present.

About Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled – Samarthanam Trust is a two-time National Award winning NGO that has carved a niche in the field of serving, enabling and empowering the differently abled and the underprivileged. Samarthanam works to lift and empower every individual in social, cultural, economic aspects so that they can contribute holistically to the society.

Born through the vision of a visually impaired Dr. GK Mahantesh and his friend, Nagesh SP, Samarthanam envisions to touch 10, 00,000 lives by 2030. The organization is affiliated to the world blind union and is one of a few non-profits to be awarded the special United nations consultative status in 2015. Samarthanam is a CRISIL rated organization with pan India presence through its 13 offices and multiple division spread across India.

Assistive Technology Accelerator (ATA) – Samarthanam has initiated Assistive Technology Accelerator (ATA) in the year 2018 with a main objective of promoting start-ups on assistive technology for persons with disabilities. The first ever summer assistive technology cohort was organized in the year 2019 in which 20 start-ups took part, 3 start-ups were selected and supported both financially and technically. Due to the pandemic, the initiative did not continue for long. Now the unit has started functioning again in 2022. The redefined objective of ATA is to ensure access of assistive technology to persons with disabilities at most affordable cost with speed and scale. The unit will also bridge the gap between the beneficiaries and the products by bringing them together, especially in the areas of MedTech, EduTech and life functions technology.