

AI for social impact with Microsoft and Social Tech Trust

Tech ought to be a central part of how we go about social transformation. There are around a thousand tech-for-good organisations in the UK, with a collective £2.3B market value, tackling problems spanning healthcare and homelessness to accessibility and energy efficiency.

To give some tangible examples of how tech can change lives – recent stats suggest that 1,250 unpaid carers have been booked a holiday through Carefree's online platform; 1,211 Parkinson's patients are walking more easily because of Walk with Path's Path Finder Laser Shoes; and 110 refugees and asylum seekers have been employed teaching languages through Chatterbox.

However, despite their evident virtues, tech-for-good startups often struggle to meet their aims and access capital. Microsoft's AI for Social Impact programme was developed to facilitate the growth of social impact tech. The collaboration between Microsoft for Startups UK and Social Tech Trust hopes specifically to help purpose-driven organisations perfect their AI capabilities.

According to Microsoft UK CEO Clare Barclay,

“The passion from entrepreneurs for solving some of the world’s most critical and challenging societal issues is palpable. The combination of their ideas, what they’ll learn from others and their development journey through this programme, is where I see the impact and the opportunity.”

Entering its third year now, the 2021 programme has just been announced. The four-month-long non-equity programme will see a hand-selected cohort given access to expert advice via workshops and one-on-one sessions, as well as up to \$25K of Azure cloud services credits. After exiting, each startup will also receive help exploring post-accelerator funding and investment opportunities.

Former participant Hello Lamp Post was recently featured in Maddynews for its talking Christmas trees, which are supporting local authorities, businesses and communities by reinvigorating the high street post-COVID. Tiernan Mines, CEO, said of his experience at the AI for Social Impact programme:

“The quality of startups in the cohort was impressive. It really helped that the companies were all at similar stages and not competing. This allowed everyone to open up and share experiences candidly, which is incredibly liberating for an entrepreneur. We’re extremely thankful to have been part of the AI for Good programme and are excited to have Microsoft and Social Tech Trust as close advisors for our journey going forward.”

Read also

Have you ever had a conversation with a talking Christmas tree?

To maximise impact, Microsoft and Social Tech Trust pick a couple of fairly narrow themes each year. For 2021, they're looking for startups that are either 'future-proofing healthcare' or 'revolutionising manufacturing and resources'. The former could entail disease prevention or ensuring equal access to healthcare; the latter might involve improving the sustainability of our supply chains.

If you're interested, you'll need to fulfil certain criteria including having a minimum of £750k of funds raised or £400k of annual revenues, and an in-house tech lead. More information about this, and the application form, can be found below. Applications close 15th January 2021.

Apply now

Article by MADDYNESS