AT2030 Venture Spotlight Series

Scaling assistive technology innovation

This AT2030 Spotlight Series profiles growth-stage assistive technology businesses developing practical technologies and business models to meet unmet access needs at scale. Each case study explores the problem they are addressing, the model they are building, the evidence behind their work, and how AT2030, GDI Hub and GDI Accelerate are supporting their growth trajectory.

UK International Development
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

AT2030

Global Disability Innovation Hub | GDI Hub Accelerate

Thinkerbell Labs

Braille literacy for every child, without requiring a specialist at every step.

10,000+
Children who have learned Braille using Annie

300+
Centres across 26 Indian states

14+
Languages supported

Time
Magazine Best Invention 2022

Thinkerbell Labs is a disability-tech social enterprise focused on how children with visual impairments learn to read. Their core product, Annie, is designed so that children can learn Braille and early literacy more independently, without needing a specialist teacher at every moment.

Recognised as one of Time Magazine's Best Inventions (2022), Annie is now used in over 300 centres across 26 Indian states and has supported more than 10,000 children. The model is beginning to extend internationally through partnerships with schools and distributors.

The Problem

For many blind children, learning to read depends on access to a trained Braille teacher. In practice, that access is very limited. Teachers are unevenly distributed, often stretched across too many students, and difficult to scale within public systems.

As a result, instruction is inconsistent. Some children receive regular support, while others only intermittently, leading many to fall behind early. The challenge is not only the availability of tools, but the ability to provide sustained, structured learning over time.

The Innovation

Annie guides children through Braille and foundational literacy in a way that allows them to move at their own pace. It can be used in classrooms, at home, or in community settings, without constant supervision. Alongside the device, the Helios platform captures and aggregates data on how children are using Annie and progressing through lessons. This gives educators, organisations, and partners visibility into learning over time, even when instruction happens across different locations. Instead of relying on fragmented or anecdotal feedback, progress can be monitored more consistently.

This model starts to change how Braille learning is delivered. Progress no longer depends entirely on how often a specialist is available, and learning outcomes become visible beyond the classroom.

Why it Works - Delivery Model

Thinkerbell works primarily through institutions. Schools, NGOs, and government programmes form the backbone of distribution, particularly in India. One notable feature is repeat procurement within these settings.

Once Annie is adopted, usage tends to expand over time. In a sector where many assistive products are purchased once and not revisited, this creates a more stable foundation for growth and planning.

The model is also adapting across contexts. In the US, a white-label partnership with American Printing House for the Blind has enabled entry into a new system. In other regions, distribution partnerships are being built more gradually. In the UK, Helios is being tested through a subscription model, introducing a recurring revenue stream alongside device sales.

Evidence and Traction

Thinkerbell has reached more than 10,000 children, with deployments across hundreds of centres in India. Early demand in international markets suggests the model can translate beyond its initial context.

Helios enables continuous monitoring of student progress and learning outcomes across deployments. This gives Thinkerbell a strong operational evidence base for educators and delivery partners. However, large institutional buyers, particularly governments and multilateral agencies, require higher-order evidence such as controlled studies, longitudinal outcomes, and cost-effectiveness models to support large-scale funding decisions. Building this layer of rigorous, decision-grade evidence on top of existing product data is critical to unlocking large, multi-year procurement programmes.

At the same time, demand is beginning to outpace operational capacity in some areas, particularly manufacturing. Scaling production without compromising quality is emerging as a key challenge in the next phase of growth.

GDI Hub Support and Engagement

Work with GDI Hub has focused on strengthening how Thinkerbell's core elements — the Annie device, the Helios platform, and its institutional partnerships — come together in practice. This has included clarifying how Annie and Helios are positioned for different buyers, thinking through what increased demand means operationally, and strengthening how learning outcomes are captured and communicated.

A central part of the engagement has been connecting product, platform, and partnerships into a clearer path forward, so that growth is not just possible, but manageable.

Wider Implication

The model shows that expanding access to assistive technology is not only a question of tools, but of reducing reliance on scarce specialist capacity. When this dependency is loosened, reach and consistency can increase significantly.

At the same time, it highlights a key bottleneck to scale: early impact must be translated into evidence that governments and funders can act on. Without this decision-grade evidence layer, adoption may remain constrained even where product performance and user-level data are strong.

GDI Accelerate is GDI Hub's platform for strengthening the systems that help inclusive innovation reach scale. The 'GDI Accelerate Growth Sprint' supports high-potential growth-stage assistive and accessible technology ventures through diagnosis, strategy refinement and investment-readiness planning, generating tailored support plans within GDI Accelerate's market-access and enterprise-strengthening model.

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Bios

Aman Srivastava
Co-founder

Aman Srivastava leads sales and partnerships at Thinkerbell Labs. A graduate of BITS Pilani, he has played a key role in building collaborations with schools, governments, and global organizations, enabling the deployment of the company's solutions across multiple regions. His focus lies in driving adoption while ensuring partnerships remain aligned with the mission of inclusive education.

Sanskriti Dawle
Co-founder

Sanskriti Dawle leads fundraising, investor relations, and global marketing at Thinkerbell Labs. A BITS Pilani graduate, she works closely with investors and partners to communicate the company's vision and progress. Her focus is on building long-term relationships that support sustainable growth and expand the reach of inclusive education solutions.

Dilip Ramesh
CEO & Co-founder

Dilip Ramesh is the CEO and Co-founder of Thinkerbell Labs. A BITS Pilani graduate with a background in technology and software development, he leads the company's overall strategy and execution. Dilip drives product innovation, oversees operations, and ensures alignment across teams as the company scales its impact globally.

Saif Shaikh
Co-founder

Saif Shaikh leads hardware and product design at Thinkerbell Labs. A BITS Pilani graduate, he has been instrumental in developing Annie and other innovations, combining technical expertise with user-centered design. He also oversees intellectual property and product scalability, ensuring the solutions are reliable, protected, and built for real-world use.