

Can ethical digital entrepreneurs solve young people's tech anxiety?

Submitted by: Co-operatives UK

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Nearly half of 16 to 25 year olds (49%) are worried about the privacy of their personal data and how their personal data is used and more than one in three (41%) are concerned that technology is being controlled by a few companies and individuals according to a recent online YouGov poll.(1)

Over half (56%) of 16-25 year olds polled also believe that having the right digital skills is very important in today's society, but almost half (44%) believe there is a digital divide as not everyone has access to hardware, software and connectivity.

But there is an ethical digital alternative to the tech giants. Platform co-ops are tech platforms owned and controlled by the users and people who provide the services. Trade body Co-operatives UK has launched an accelerator programme to support entrepreneurs to develop their emerging ideas.

British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting service Signalise (<https://www.uk.coop/case-studies/signalise-co-op-we-bring-deaf-people-and-interpreters-together-hive>) is a pioneering example of a platform co-op. Signalise is co-run and co-owned by Deaf people and BSL interpreters, who come together to collaborate, discuss and drive the business for their mutual benefit. Unlike the profit-led corporations that have traditionally been providers, Signalise are improving access to health services by empowering users and giving them choice and control over their access.

BSL interpreter, Kwan Perry, said:

"We've never had control over our services. We're told what to do by faceless agencies and it felt like the time for change."

North London delivery service Wings

(<https://www.uk.coop/case-studies/wings-fairer-food-delivery-improves-working-lives-unfound>) is another platform co-op. It was created in direct response to the gig economy where riders' earnings are unpredictable and often below the minimum wage. Wings pays riders a guaranteed London Living Wage and provides them with job security, sick pay and benefits. It operates with 100% zero-carbon vehicles and is committed to prioritising local, independent businesses over big chains.

Wings was set up with the support from the UnFound Accelerator – a 10-week accelerator for digital business start-ups that use mobile apps or online platforms to provide services and solutions. UnFound aims to launch a new wave of fairer, ethical and co-operatively owned tech businesses.

Rolling out again in spring 2022, the free business accelerator is now open for applications (<https://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/support/start-platform-co-op/unfound-accelerator>) from aspiring UK-based ethical digital businesses.

Wings co-founder, Rich Mason said:

"We took part in the accelerator programme in the run up to our launch and working together with industry

experts and groups developing their own platform co-op ideas was an invaluable experience."

Delivered by Co-operatives UK, the national network body for co-ops, and supported by The Co-operative Bank, the Unfound Accelerator draws on an extensive network of experts to help ethical digital start-ups plan their businesses and develop their products, strategy, branding and marketing.

The accelerator helps participants find the right co-op model for their digital business and take them through the steps for launching it. With weekly workshops, regular check-ins and one-to-one sessions, aspiring entrepreneurs will go from idea to operating business. And they'll learn how to shape an ethical digital enterprise that can launch successfully.

At the end of the 10-week accelerator, teams are invited to pitch their idea to a live audience and a panel of judges with the chance to win a share of a £10,000 prize fund donated by The Co-operative Bank.

Co-operatives UK's CEO, Rose Marley, said:

"Today's co-operative movement is driving some dynamic new developments that aim to create a fairer economy. Collaborative tech sits front and central to this, and Co-operatives UK has been at the forefront of supporting game-changing platform co-ops for a number of years."

"We are anticipating an exponential growth of these 'new look' co-operatives and absolutely believe they are well placed to tackle some of society's new problems."

Catherine Douglas, Managing Director, SME Banking at The Co-operative Bank, said:

"We're excited to hear from pioneering ethical digital start-ups and to see the teams develop as they take part in the UnFound Accelerator. Co-operatives are proving to be a vital business model for workers and communities in the current climate. We're proud to be at the forefront of supporting new co-operative businesses through our investment in this programme and our support for the wider UK co-operative movement."

For more information and to apply go to www.unfound.coop/accelerator
(<http://www.unfound.coop/accelerator>)

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EDITORS NOTES

For more information, case studies or to interview Rose Marley contact Leila O'Sullivan via 07736282699 or leila.osullivan@uk.coop

(1) All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2016 UK 16-25 year olds online. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3rd - 12th December 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK 16-25 year olds online.

CASE STUDIES

Wings is an ethical food delivery co-operative which sprung up out of the Covid pandemic as a group of

volunteers came together to provide free food deliveries to those in need. This sparked an idea to provide an ethical alternative to existing food delivery apps, to give delivery riders fair pay and conditions. wings.coop (<https://www.wings.coop>)

Signalise is a multi-stakeholder co-operative run by its members to provide interpreting to services who need to book interpreters. Signalise is a platform co-op allowing all users to request, book and confirm interpreting via the platform in a way that is innovative and benefits all users. signalise.coop (<https://www.signalise.coop>)

See more platform co-op case studies

(<https://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/support/start-platform-co-op/case-studies>)

ABOUT CO-OPERATIVES UK

As the voice of the UK's co-operative movement, we empower and support co-operative enterprise with specialised knowledge and expertise, to grow the co-operative economy and create a fairer society.

From football clubs and farms, to convenience stores and pubs, there are more than 7,000 co-operatives in the UK, each owned and controlled by their members and based on a set of shared principles and values.

By promoting shared wealth through member ownership, we are committed to enable anyone in the UK to form, or join, thriving and sustainable co-ops. www.uk.coop (<https://www.uk.coop>)