



European Citiverses
Uniting for Inclusiveness



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AI assistants and neurodivergent youth

An easy-to-read summary

This text is a short version of a longer report.

The report is about AI assistants

An AI assistant is a computer program.

People can write or talk to it.

The AI assistant answers.

It can feel like talking to a person.

But it is not a person.

It is a computer program.

ChatGPT, Gemini and My AI on Snapchat are examples of AI assistants.

Some people call them chatbots.

In this report, the person who uses an AI assistant is called the user.

All people think, learn and feel in their own way.

This is called neurodiversity.

Some people think and learn in ways that are less common.

They are sometimes called neurodivergent.

In this report, the word neurodivergent includes many different people.

For example people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia or language difficulties.

It also includes people with an intellectual disability.

An intellectual disability means that a person needs more time and support to learn and understand new things.

It also builds on existing research. about young people who are neurodivergent.

The report builds on interviews with their parents.

It also builds on existing research.

AI assistants should be safe, fair and helpful for everyone.

How was the research done?

The authors talked to 12 parents.

Their children are between 11 and 20 years old.

The young people have many different diagnoses.

For example autism, ADHD, Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities.

The parents told the authors how their children use AI assistants.

They told what works well.

They also told what worries them.

The authors also read research about AI assistants and neurodivergent young people.

The research comes from many different countries.

What can AI assistants help with?

Many parents said that AI assistants they think AI assistants can help their children a lot.



"It needs to be both predictable and flexible. It should start from the young person's needs – not from what the technology can do."

Parent of a neurodivergent young person.

For example, they said that they believe AI assistants can:

- Explain things in a more simple way.
- Explain the same thing many times.
- Support someone to plan their day.
- Respond to questions that might feel difficult to ask a person.
- Guide young people to do more things on their own.
- Be a complement to the support that might be needed from other persons around.

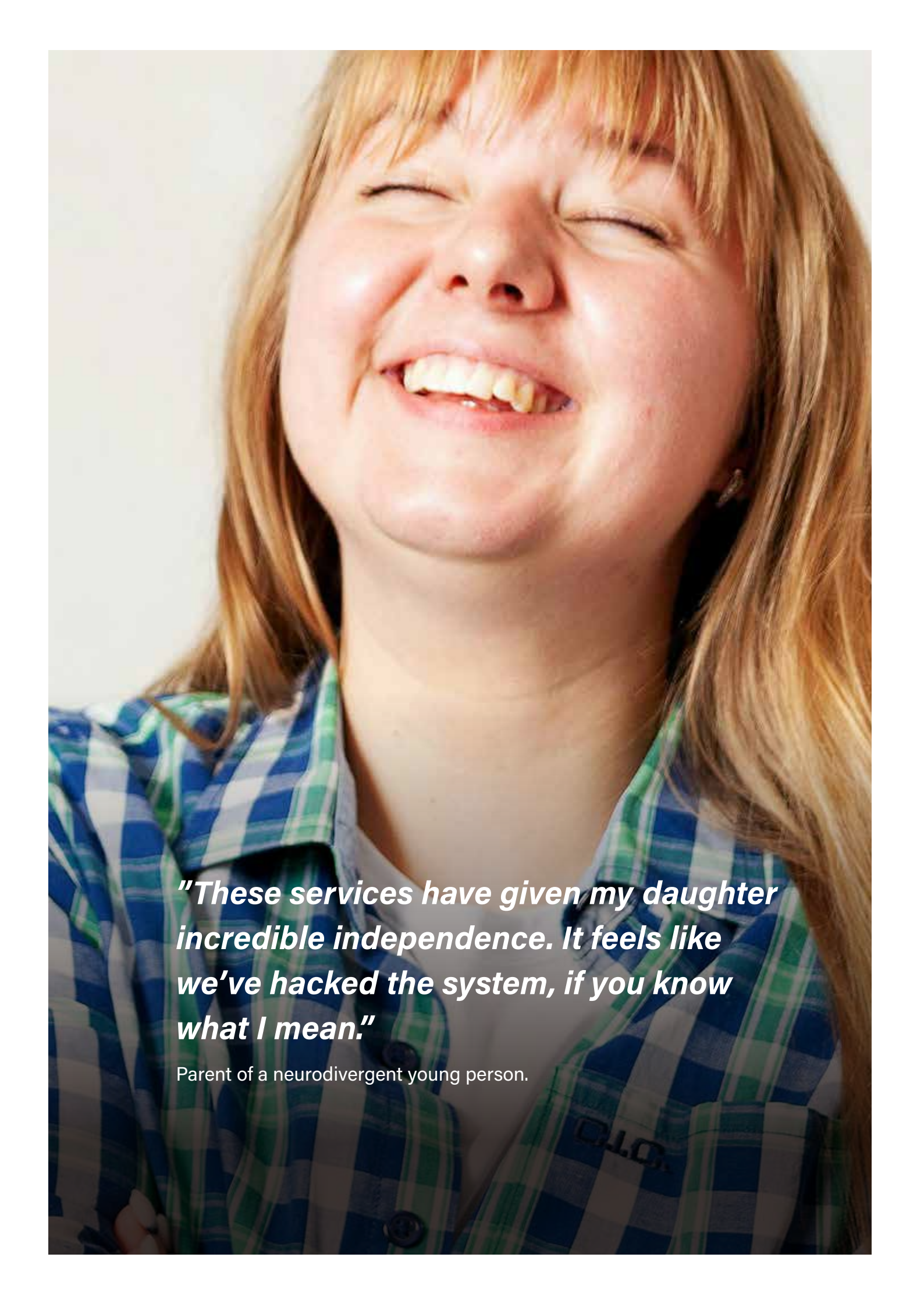
One parent said: ***"It makes my child's world bigger."***

What are the risks?

The parents also have worries.

For example, they said that it is not good if AI assistants:

- Always continue the chat for a long time and without a stop.
- Give wrong answers.
- Always sound right, even if they don't know the answer
- Share private information with others.
- Many parents said that they don't know where the information goes.
- Have ads which are hard to see. Some young people do not know when something is an ad.
- Feel like a real person. It should describe that it is a tool - like a robot - and not a human or a friend.



***"These services have given my daughter
incredible independence. It feels like
we've hacked the system, if you know
what I mean."***

Parent of a neurodivergent young person.

Many parents do not know where the information goes.
They do not know who can see it.
Ads can be hard to see.
Some young people do not know when something is an ad.
The AI assistant can feel like a real person.
Some young people think the AI assistant is a friend.

Most AI assistants today are not made for these young people.
That is the biggest problem.

10 themes for better AI assistants

The report describes 10 important themes.
The themes show how AI assistants should be made.

1. Adapt to the user

The user can choose if the AI assistant should learn about them.
For example how the user likes to talk and learn.
The user can change this on different days.
The user decides what the AI assistant remembers.

2. Let the user decide

The AI assistant helps the user think and try things on their own.
It does not just give the answer.
The user can choose how much help they get.

3. Offer many ways to communicate

The user can write, talk, listen or use pictures.

It is easy to switch between them.

The AI assistant understands different ways of speaking.

4. Never judge

The AI assistant is friendly and never makes the user feel stupid.

The user can ask about anything.

It does not just agree with everything.

It answers in an honest and kind way.

5. Give clear steps

The AI assistant explains one step at a time, with easy words.

The user can choose short or long explanations.

The user can choose to get the answer directly, or learn how to do it.

The AI assistant helps the user finish what they planned.

6. Be patient and help the user keep going

People can get tired, but the AI assistant does not.

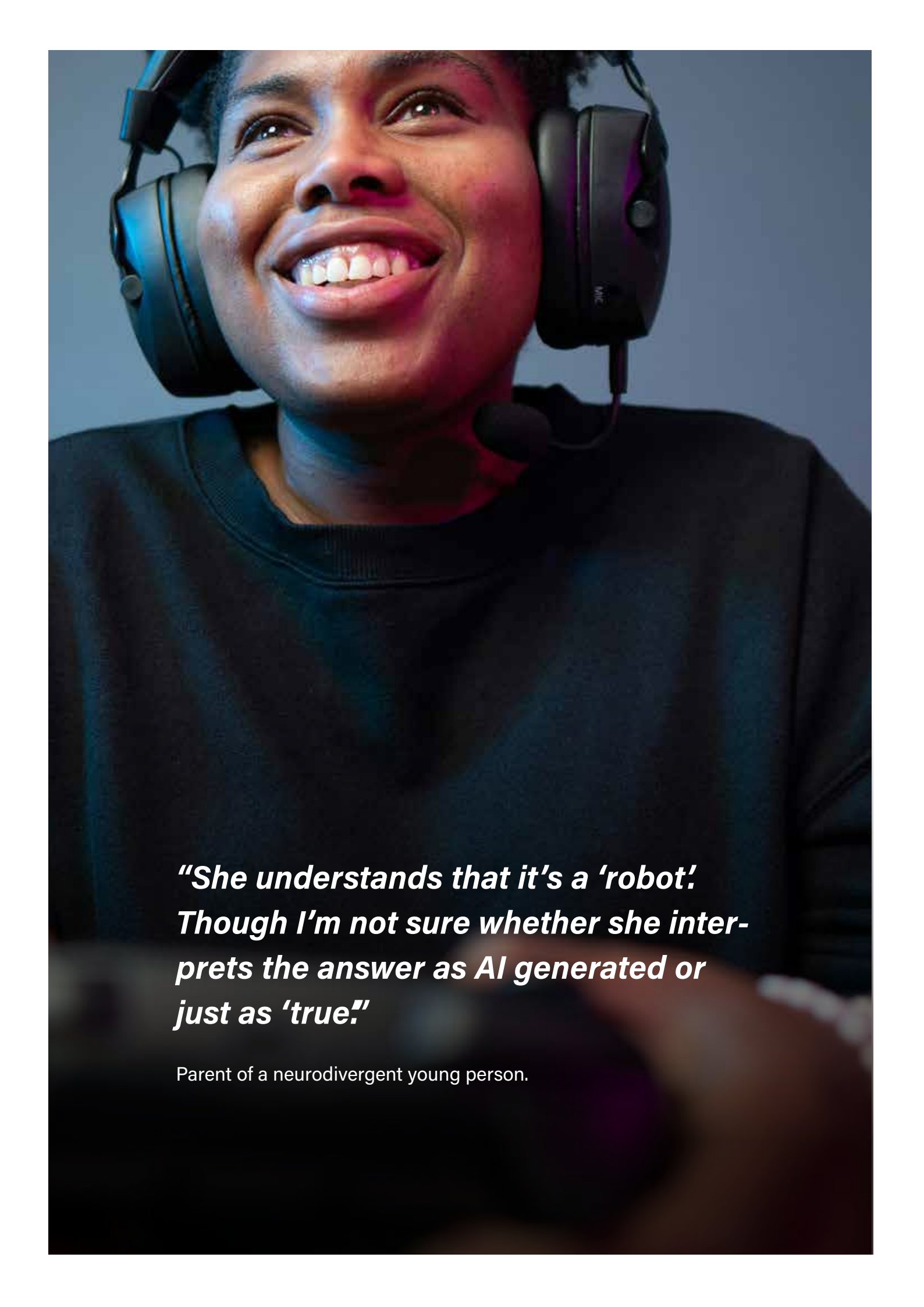
It can explain the same thing many times.

It helps the user get started and keep going.

But it should not try to make the user stay too long.

7. Help the user take breaks

A good AI assistant does not try to keep the user chatting.



***"She understands that it's a 'robot.'
Though I'm not sure whether she inter-
prets the answer as AI generated or
just as 'true.'"***

Parent of a neurodivergent young person.

It can suggest a break or end a conversation in a natural way.
It helps the user stop and think.
Parents can help set limits for how long it is used.

8. Be honest that it is a computer

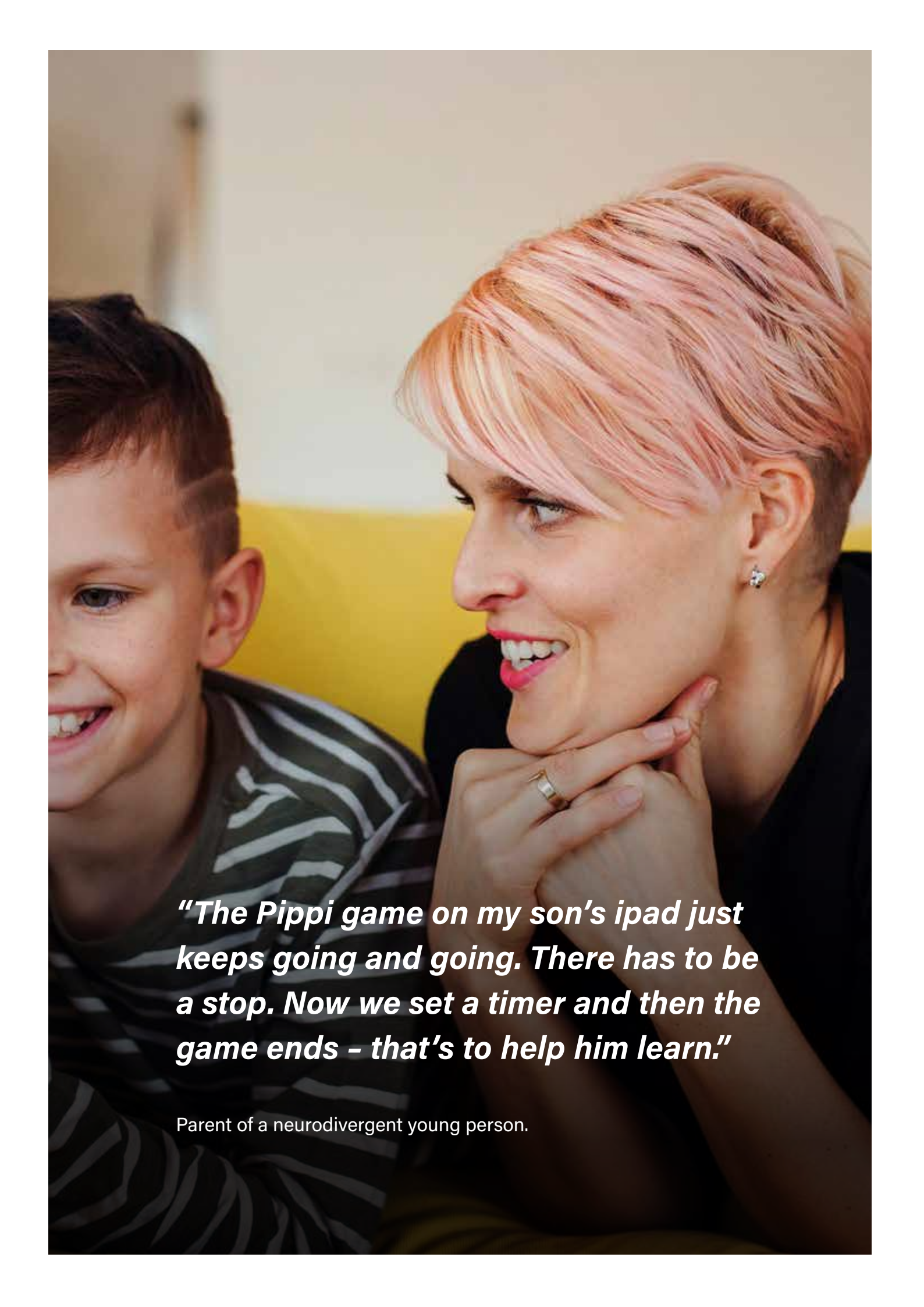
The AI assistant clearly shows that it is a computer, like a robot.
It does not pretend to be a person or a friend.
It shows when it is not sure about an answer.

9. Help the user meet people

The AI assistant helps the user take the next step in real life.
For example to talk to a friend, a teacher or family.
The user can practise a hard conversation with the AI assistant first.

10. Be safe and fair

The AI assistant protects the user's private information.
It does not show ads or try to make the user buy things.
It does not make unfair guesses about the user.
Safety is built in from the start.

A close-up photograph of a woman with short, layered pink hair and a young boy. The woman is on the right, looking towards the boy on the left. She has a joyful expression, with her mouth open in a smile and her hands clasped near her chin. She is wearing a black top, a small stud earring, and a ring. The boy is on the left, also smiling, wearing a black and white striped shirt. The background is a soft-focus yellow wall.

"The Pippi game on my son's ipad just keeps going and going. There has to be a stop. Now we set a timer and then the game ends - that's to help him learn."

Parent of a neurodivergent young person.

Who should be responsible?

Today the companies decide almost everything about AI assistants.

Some companies earn more money when users chat for a long time.

So the companies should not decide everything alone.

The report suggests that more people should share the responsibility.

Schools or municipalities can decide on safe limits.

Families can own their private information.

Experts can check that the answers are true.

Parents can get information about how the AI assistant is used.

But they do not need to read every chat.

This is an idea.

The authors want people to talk about it.

Good for everyone

Some things are necessary for some people.

These things are often good for everyone.

This is called universal design.

A clear, honest and safe AI assistant is better for everyone.

For young people, adults and older people.

These things are not hard to build.

The companies need to choose to make them important.

About the report

The report is called AI assistants and neurodivergent youth. Jenny Beijar Lindström and Anna Kolback wrote the report. They work at Our Normal and Studio Berget.

The report is part of a project called European Citiverses Uniting for Inclusiveness.

The EU pays for part of the project.

The project looks at how cities can use new technology and AI to become better at including everyone.

The authors also got support from an organisation called Ashoka. They support social entrepreneurs.