



# iCats Fellowship Program

LGT Venture Philanthropy

## An iCat's experience

**Cynthia Schweer, an alumni iCats Fellow 2009 describes her experience to work for mothers2mothers in Cape Town, South Africa.**

After doing my MBA at INSEAD, I set up the US operations of Starfish, an organization that assists orphaned and vulnerable children in South Africa. This work was exciting since it combined the entrepreneurial and social elements that I sought in my career. In this role, I saw first-hand the difficulty of making a difference in a chronically resource-constrained sector.

After a year on the fundraising side, I wanted to spend more time out in the field and was keen to apply my business experience to the challenge of creating sustainable models for social change. Early in 2009, I was accepted as an LGT Venture Philanthropy iCats Fellow (the Program offers training, mentorship and financial support to mid-career professionals providing business expertise to social organizations) and began working for mothers2mothers as a business development strategist. mothers2mothers is one of currently 13 portfolio organizations, LGT Venture Philanthropy is investing into. mothers2mothers (m2m) is a great example of a 'professional social organization' – an organization applying business principles in the public health sector, specifically by employing and training HIV+ mothers as mentors and increasing uptake of treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The organization has grown rapidly and is now operating in nearly 600 clinics in 7 countries, hiring more than 1 500 HIV+ mothers as peer education leaders who empower others to protect their babies.

Interestingly, as a former management consultant, I find that my days are not dissimilar from my previous career. The major difference is that instead of saving a corporation cent on the dollar, I am trying to increase the number of women who are able to access life-saving care. Spreadsheet models become infinitely more interesting when applied in that context!

I worked closely with the management team to implement the strategic plan, building models to deliver services in new locations, performing analyses to understand m2m's impact and cost-effectiveness, and ensuring that we are meeting funding requirements. I also helped to streamline support functions, such as budgeting, planning and forecasting, so that our resources go further.

There are the same organizational issues one find in for-profit companies but often coupled with severe resource constraints. This means that you will often be called upon to 'wear many hats' and stretch your skills and comfort zone. You will also need to be able to tolerate a less-defined career path. Business acumen is also key. I applied my background in hospitality – working with operations teams and franchisees to implement brand standards – to developing a franchise model for quicker provision of m2m services. I also used my skills in accounting and finance to assist m2m in their financial reporting processes.





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The most inspiring part of the job was visiting sites where HIV+ mothers are educating pregnant women to take control of their health and that of their babies. I visited sites in South Africa, Malawi and Kenya: seeing and realizing how many woman and babies will be affected – nearly 20 000 annually in Malawi alone – was proof to me of how important this work is.

When Cynthia was asked how she experienced the iCats Fellowship Program, she said: “I have met amazing people, both at m2m and LGT Venture Philanthropy. These new colleagues have enriched my life considerably, by challenging me to think differently about the world and allowing me to do work that is intellectually and emotionally fulfilling. I joined the Fellowship with some cynicism toward the nonprofit sector; the level of talent that I have witnessed at m2m has changed that fundamentally. I consider this fellowship as a complete transformation of my career going forward.”

LGT Venture Philanthropy is currently looking for business professionals who are keen on making a similar experience and want to use their professional skills to help social organizations around the globe scaling their impact. Building on the success of the last 2 years, LGT Venture Philanthropy offers exciting opportunities for 2011! Application deadline: 23 July 2010. Apply now for the iCats Fellowship Program 2011.

A Fellow works 11 months on-site with a portfolio organization from February to December 2011 and receives regular mentoring from the LGT Venture Philanthropy team. In addition, a 4-day induction workshop brings all fellows together in Switzerland.

If you want to find out more about the Program, visit [www.icatsprogram.com](http://www.icatsprogram.com) or write an email to [icats@lgtvp.com](mailto:icats@lgtvp.com).

