



Cynthia Schweer comes from the U.S. and brings nine years of work experience as consultant and financial analyst as well as an MBA from INSEAD.

She left her position as CEO of Starfish Greathearts Foundation USA in New York City to become a fellow and work as a Financial Analyst / Business Development Strategist with mothers2mothers (m2m) in Cape Town, South Africa.

Why did you join the program?

„Prior to joining the program, I worked for a year as CEO for a non-profit organization. In this role, I saw firsthand the challenge of creating impactful programs in a chronically resource-constrained sector. I was motivated to join the fellowship program because I wanted to apply my business experience to the challenge of creating sustainable models for social change.“

How is your current work different from what you used to do before?

„As a former management consultant, I am finding that the work is remarkably similar to my previous career. The major difference is that instead of saving a corporation cents 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!“

During the fellowship – what motivates you?

„Every day is different, with a new set of challenges and opportunities to help m2m grow as an organization. This is what work should feel like: a daily excitement to show up and make your contribution to a team that is accomplishing what they set out to do. In the case of m2m, we are empowering mothers to save their babies, which is enormously satisfying at the end of the day.“

What has been the most touching moment so far?

„The moment that most affected me so far was when I sat down with the Malawi team to help them project the financial needs to expand their program to an additional 25 sites in the next year. When I realized how many women and babies will be impacted - 3,000 in 1 year - I had a realization of how important this work is.“

What is the value of this experience for you?

„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.“

To whom would you recommend the program?

„I would emphasize the need for flexibility and ingenuity. Social enterprises, particularly those in startup phase, are greatly in need of individuals who can entrepreneurially identify an issue and develop solutions. Your tasks and role will change dynamically as the organizations grows, on a monthly - even daily - basis. If you thrive in an environment where the only constant is change, then the fellowship is right for you.“

mothers2mothers (m2m), Cape Town, South Africa



Problem

In parts of Africa, up to 75% of babies born to HIV+ mothers stand to lose their mothers to AIDS-related illnesses. Without intervention, more than 25% of these children will themselves inherit the virus. By 2010, an estimated 18 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa alone will be orphaned by HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Solution

- m2m aims to reduce the transmission of HIV from mothers to babies, and keep mothers healthy by increasing their access to health-sustaining medical care.
- m2m hires mothers living with HIV as mentor mothers to support and educate HIV+ pregnant women how to live with HIV/AIDS
- m2m uses education and empowerment tools to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV/AIDS during and after pregnancy, combat stigma within families and communities, support a mother’s adherence to medical treatment, and reduce the likelihood of AIDS orphans

Impact

Impact m2m	2007	2008	2009e	2010e	2011e
HIV+ Mothers reached annually (in thousands)	50	150	300	600	750
Mentor mothers employed	300	1000	1600	2500	3300
Active sites	155	460	600	1130	1500
Active countries	2	7	10	12	15

What does m2m say about Cynthia?

“Cynthia is comfortable working as a generalist across our program and finance departments. Cynthia is adaptable, she knows how to listen, she can work comfortably in a fast-paced environment, she is a quick learner, and most importantly, Cynthia is a great team player.” *David Torres, m2m*