



For immediate release:

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LGT Venture Philanthropy partners with SmartStart to expand access to quality early learning in low-income communities in South Africa

LGT Venture Philanthropy Foundation (LGT VP), today announced a new engagement to support [SmartStart](#). With LGT VP's flexible, non-programmatic funding and operational support, SmartStart will build additional capacity in leadership, data analytics and monitoring & evaluation.

SmartStart is taking quality and affordable early learning opportunities to tens of thousands of children across South Africa. Their vision is to achieve population-level change in access to early learning by providing an integrated national delivery platform, which builds in the operational structures and systems for accelerated scale. Their innovative social franchise model enables them to harness the experience of their implementing partners (existing ECD service providers and NGOs), who license and support a network of early learning practitioners to deliver the same evidence-based programme for three to five-year-olds. The programme is supported by operational resources and play materials, licensing and quality assurance processes, and a network of 'Clubs' that provide peer support.

SmartStart is not only ensuring that more children have the right foundations in place to succeed at school and beyond; they are also supporting skills development and micro-enterprise, enabling more women to work and stimulating economic activity in under-resourced communities.

As part of its education strategy, LGT VP is committed to supporting innovative and scalable education service providers to strengthen community based ECD delivery. This focus aligns with research which establishes that early learning offers the highest social impact returns in education within Sub-Saharan Africa. "We are proud to partner with an organization committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of background, can benefit from early learning opportunities" says Marcia Parada, Senior Investment Manager at LGT VP, "we see in SmartStart a strong partner with a model to scale across communities in South Africa, delivering quality, affordable early learning and care while creating livelihoods for thousands of women."

“Our vision is to help achieve universal access to quality early learning for 3 – 5-year olds in South Africa by 2030, by providing a systems solution to the challenge of delivering early learning at scale,” said Grace Matlhope, CEO of SmartStart. “As a full-service early learning delivery platform, we continue to place collaboration at the heart of our approach, building strategic partnerships with organizations who share our vision.”

“A big priority for our country and for the world as we rebuild from the devastation of the coronavirus, is economic recovery,” says Grace. “And a sustainable economy must start with a generation of children who have an equal start in life; with women who are able to contribute meaningfully and maximally in the labour force; and with support for micro-enterprises that are carrying the full burden of providing early learning in South Africa.

“We are excited to partner with LGT VP on the next phase of our journey, when we plan to rapidly expand reach and impact, benefiting 130 000 children by 2022. The financial and strategic support offered by LGT VP will assist SmartStart to offer meaningful solutions to urgent policy and economic dilemmas facing South Africa.”