

## Digital Opportunity Trust Empowers Interns to Help Others

Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) is a Canada-based international nonprofit organization that aims to create educational and economic opportunities by teaching people how to use ICT effectively. DOT has established programs in several countries including Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Turkey, and China. In the United States, DOT is a strategic partner in the Cisco® 21st Century Schools Initiative (21S).

### Background

Since 2002, Cisco and DOT have worked together to promote the use of ICT for social and economic development in the Middle East and Africa. In 2006, DOT became a supporter of the Cisco 21S program, which aims to create a sustainable model for technology-supported education reform. The 21S program was launched in Mississippi and Louisiana school districts that were affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2008, Cisco extended the 21st Century Schools blueprint to schools in California and New York.

Janet Longmore, president and CEO of DOT, attributes the success of the partnership between Cisco and DOT to several factors. “We share a vision with Cisco of a connected world in the 21st century,” she says. “Cisco believes in the human network, and we believe in the power of teaching people how to use technology effectively. Cisco also recognizes the importance of scalability in the work we’re doing, and our partnership has enabled DOT to move rapidly along this path.”

### DOT Interns

Much of the work that DOT does is supported by interns who receive leadership, facilitation, and communications training, and then share their knowledge with members of their communities. “The program allows us to mobilize the talent of young people who understand technology to meet a huge need for ICT skills among teachers, marginalized women, entrepreneurs, and small businesses,” explains Longmore. “Over the years, we’ve mobilized more than 750 young people who have benefited more than 65,000 community members.”



DOT interns Louis Whittington, Patricia Oyoyo, and Antoine Powell (left to right)

“This experience has been great,” says DOT Kenya intern Patricia Oyoyo. “I’ve learned new career and technical skills, increased my self confidence and self esteem, and gained work experience.” Oyoyo completed an internship in the Nyanza province of Kenya, where she taught youth and women how to build sustainable livelihoods through the use of ICT. “I taught the DOT ReachUp! curriculum, which focuses on technology, business skills, and empowerment to help individuals identify opportunities to build their careers and improve their standard of living,” says Oyoyo. “We work mainly with youth and women, who tend to be the most disadvantaged community members. We want them to be able to use local resources and be successful.”

In the United States, DOT interns participate in the TeachUp! program to help teachers integrate technology into their lessons. “We help bridge the gap between technology and education,” explains DOT USA intern Antoine Powell. “Teachers are looking for something that will make their jobs easier and allow them to focus on students instead of how they’re doing things,” says Powell. “Once you show them how beneficial technology is, how easy it will make their jobs, and how disciplined and engaged the students will be; they’ll start using the technologies. And after they learn how to use the technologies, they can go out and teach other teachers how to use them.”

### DOT and the Art of Change

Kevin ‘Stero’ Irungu grew up in the Kibera slum of Nairobi and turned his passion for art into a business through DOT’s ReachUp! program for entrepreneurs.

Irungu and three other beneficiaries created an art center where young community members can create and showcase their artwork for prospective buyers.

This project has been so successful that Irungu is being sponsored to share his story in Europe. Irungu and his team also plan to make their own movies and are currently developing a video about life in Kibera. “We plan to give Hollywood a run for its money,” he says.

“Teachers love to teach, so when they can help other teachers with new technologies, it empowers them,” says DOT USA intern Louis Whittington. “Pre-Katrina, our school systems didn’t have much of anything,” recalls Whittington, who grew up in Jackson, Mississippi. “The newest technology was dry-erase boards when I was going to school, so after Katrina, I enjoyed watching the interaction between teachers and all the new technologies.” Based on his experiences as an intern, Whittington plans to launch a website design business, as well as a program to help familiarize people with Internet tools and capabilities.

“DOT interns are building 21st century skills such as collaboration and project management,” says Longmore. “They understand the importance of these skills, and they’re putting this knowledge into practice in places where these are new concepts. The internship program allows talented young people to stay within

their countries and use these skills to have an impact at the community level. The program is applicable across numerous countries, and helps create more economic opportunities and a greater understanding of the enabling power of information technology

### Future Plans

“We’re moving into the next significant level of impact,” says Longmore. “We’re now operating in 11 countries at various stages of development and we’re working closely with our partners to track results in terms of increased incomes and long-term impact. Over the next few years, we hope to demonstrate that ICT can promote economic, educational, and social development, in very innovative and powerful ways.”

In partnership with Cisco, DOT recently expanded their operations into the Sichuan province in China to help rebuild schools and communities that were devastated by the May 2008 earthquake. “Through Cisco’s partnership and the investments they’ve made, we now have the opportunity to take lessons and experiences from the TeachUp! program in the United States, and adapt it for use in China,” says Longmore. “The scale will be quite huge.”

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