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Organisation wins \$1m to fight infection of babies

JO-ANNE SMETHERHAM

A SOUTH African organisation that prevents thousands of babies being born with HIV every month has won a prestigious \$1million award.

Mothers2mothers is "creating a generation of HIV-negative children", said communications manager Linda Codran. The organisation advises women who have HIV and who are entering medical programmes that prevent their unborn babies from contracting HIV.

Mothers2mothers received one of the 11 Skoll Awards for Social Entrepreneurship, which are granted by the Skoll Foundation in Palo Alto, California, to "social entrepreneurs" whose models have been successful. The grant is awarded over three years. Co-founders Mitch Besser and Gene Falk attended the award ceremony last night in Oxford, England.

All the mothers2mothers counsellors are mothers who have already had the treatment and about 40 000 women are counselled every month, said Codran. Almost all the babies born to mothers in the programme are born HIV-negative.

"Our goal is to prevent babies contracting HIV, and keep the babies and their mothers healthy," she said. "Getting this award is pretty amazing. Out of hundreds of organisations that applied, only 11 got the \$1 million. We're very, very proud and at the same time very humbled.

"Pregnant women who learn they have HIV are immediately filled with fear that they are going to die and their child will have HIV. That's not the case at all. The programme helps them to let go of that fear and be filled with hope.

"The fact that this programme works is what makes it special."

Mothers2mothers operates at 121 sites in South Africa.