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# voices

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**T**here are so many things that are going wrong in the world today and many of them pose a threat to the rule of law, social cohesion and, ultimately, peace. What is heartwarming though is that there are so many people who are engaged in acts of goodness to make this world a better place. One of these acts of goodness is child adoption.

The Baby Home and The Peace Agency, led by Justin and Cathy Foxton and Jo Teunissen, are among those who are stepping up to fix the brokenness they see in the world.

They do so through providing crisis homes for orphaned or abandoned babies and placing them up for adoption as soon as possible.

While adoption was originally conceived as a gap filler for those unable to have biological children, it has now become a response, beyond infertility challenges, to find homes for children.

Adoption gives children a place they can call home and the life of belonging is essential for all human beings.

There is an African proverb that says: "There are two gifts we should give our children. One is roots and the other is wings."

The ideal place for a child to receive these two gifts is a home with two loving, healthy and economically secure parents, who belong to a supportive community that steps in to help whenever necessary.

You must agree that the constitutional promise of a freed potential and better life for all citizens starts with a fair start in life.

For children, the constitutional promise includes the rights protected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to a name, family or protected care; and freedom from abuse, hunger and exposure to drugs, trafficking and other harmful practices.

Children are entitled to recreation and to practise their own culture and religion, among others.

But this is not possible for many children.

In her article on November 9, Lithalethamba Stwayi, an attorney at the Centre for Child Law at the University of Pretoria, said that: "According to the SA Child Gauge report there were about 3.1 million orphaned children in South Africa in 2016. As many as 3 500 babies are abandoned each year - and this figure includes only those who survive."

Of course, most orphaned children live with extended family members and do not need to be placed in other forms of care. Nevertheless, there are still many children in the country who could be adopted.

"It is surprising and concerning, therefore, that the number of adoptions is steadily dropping. Only 10 021 legal adoptions were registered between 2010 and 2016 in South Africa. Local adoptions decreased from 2 234 in 2010/11 to 978 in 2015/16."

What should happen when a child is orphaned or abandoned and no relatives are willing to take care of him or her?

Stats SA reports that there are 200 000 households that are headed by children under 15.

My conversations with The Peace Agency and The Baby Home have revealed anecdotal evidence suggesting there may be some reluctance in government agencies to support or expedite adoption, particularly in intercultural cases.



**SHELTER** In this file picture, which was taken on the eve of Child Protection Week, the National Adoption Coalition launched its new Add-Option TV commercial, made possible by a host of sponsors and partners who are passionate about child protection and finding loving homes for orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children

PHOTO: LUCKY MAIBI

## ADOPTION CAN HELP DESTITUTE

# children

By investing in children we are investing in a **less fractured** world, reducing poverty and inequality

It would appear the reluctance is premised on the need for a child to be with his or family and to be culturally grounded.

This is a valid concern but, although culture gives one roots, it cannot override the need for wings. I understand concerns include apprehension over human trafficking and other forms of child abuse. Does keeping children in limbo solve or exacerbate the problem of growing pains for children?

One of the papers presented at the Human Rights Forum in Sweden last year showed that a delay in child adoption condemns children to institutional life because, after two years, it's more difficult to find adoptive parents. This is not surprising because the first 1 000 days are the most important for shaping the life of a child, physiologically, emotionally, psychologically and socially.

Brain development also critically takes place during that time, hence the concern that more than 28% of children in the country are said to be growing with brain underdevelopment due to malnutrition.

The study also said that institutional upbringing kills children's dreams.

What's in it for you and me? It's simple. Our actions co-create the world in which we want to live. In the Phantom of the Opera, an abused child grows up to be

a murderous monster.

By investing in children we are investing in a less fractured world. In our Social Justice M-Plan Team we believe that as long as there is injustice somewhere, there can't be sustainable peace anywhere. That is why we are mobilising academic research and civil society resources to mount a Marshall Plan to help break the back of poverty and inequality by 2030.

Our research shows that even without corruption, maladministration and other forms of improper conduct in state affairs, government alone cannot end poverty. We have established that poverty and inequality operate like debt and, if reduced, in minuscule amounts they increase rather than decrease.

We've learnt that poverty and inequality operate like epidemics in that one area of disparity reinforces another. Poor education and poor health, for example, influence poverty/economic opportunity and vice versa. We believe a systems thinking approach incorporating data, informed decision making and social impact investments would be important for the country to meet its national development plan and sustainable development goals by 2030.

The ThuMa Foundation, of which I'm a part, also believes that our world is increasingly fractured and unstable because too many are left behind in the

distribution of democracy dividends. Among its solutions that seek to foster democracy literacy and leadership is the Thuma Enterprising Communities initiative, a project that seeks to help communities drive their own sustainable development. We will partner Partners for Possibilities, Africa Teen Geeks and other non profit organisations that focus on education, health and socioeconomic inclusion.

"Adopting a child won't change the world," said The Baby Home. I believe it can. Who knows? That adopted child could become the next Einstein equivalent. The African Mathematical Science Institute believes the next Einstein equivalent will come from this continent, which for many years has produced informal innovators from villages and townships who only need support to polish and scale their ideas.

There's a Yiddish proverb that says: "The ocean cannot be emptied with a can."

This is true. But it's small drops that constitute the mighty ocean. As Ethiopians say, little by little, an egg will walk.

Furthermore, if we all fix the small problems we can, we are unlikely to be overwhelmed by the big ones we can't solve.

Madonsela is chair of social justice at Stellenbosch University and founder of the Thuma Foundation

