Foreword

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According to Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey of 2017, about 22% of South African children are not living with even one biological parent. There are many reasons for this. Children may rely on grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members to play the parental role, for all or part of the year. In the rare cases where children are without family care, the state is responsible for placing children in alternative care and ensuring that they are supported. Schools, religious structures, community organisations, after-care facilities and NGOs also help to provide family-style environments, especially when children fall through the cracks. The need for such care does not end when a child reaches age 18.

Universities play an important role in providing a "home away from home" for students. Research shows that first-year students who receive well-rounded institutional support tend to thrive academically. Such support helps to develop their values and skills to enter the world as responsible, compassionate citizens. This is true for young people everywhere, but especially for those who have faced overwhelming odds in childhood.

Michael Tladi never knew his father and was abandoned by his single mother at the age of five. He lived on the streets of Pretoria, relying on older boys and petty crime to survive.

He was taken into a shelter run by people who recognised his ability and helped him matriculate. With their encouragement, Tladi came to the University of Cape Town (UCT) to study electromechanical engineering. Faculty staff helped Tladi to register for classes, access tutoring and get psychological counselling to help him come to terms with his past. UCT financial assistance supplemented the bursary he received from Link-SA. He graduated after eight years, to loud applause from his classmates and academics. Today he is an engineer in the Department of Transport and Public Works Directorate.

While he was still studying, Tladi began visiting the Emasithandane Children's Project in Nyanga township to help the orphans with lessons. After graduating he raised funds to build a new wing at Emasi, with a separate study room equipped with computers and desks. He was able to do so because other people had given family-style support to him – including my colleagues at UCT.

The Children's Institute is just one excellent example of the research UCT is doing to generate a strong evidence base for social policy and action. The *South African Child Gauge* in particular has set a benchmark for communicating research on the many different challenges confronting children in South Africa. This 13th issue has been produced in collaboration with the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development at our sister university, Wits. It focuses on Children, Families and the State, and explores the ways families, communities, government and society as a whole can collaborate effectively to nurture children and support their development. Such research informs policy and leads to solutions to real problems on the ground. But the fact is, beyond being academics and activist-researchers, each of us can help create spaces to give someone else family-style support. We can invest ourselves, confident that the result will be a growing community of compassion.