

Stay hopeful - millennials are not the lost generation

BONOLO, Boitshupo, Cabral, Chanice, Clement, Eugene, Nqabisa, Nokukhanya, Nomonde, Mmeli, Yanga and Zuko*... We are grateful for all the people who make a difference to our lives: the teachers who go the extra mile, the parents, who even despite their lack of education, are involved in our education, the government which protects us and builds facilities for us, the businesses that reach out to us and the volunteers who mentor and support us.

But we are still far from realising our dreams. We reach out to you to help us fulfil this generation's true destiny. We are not a lost generation.

We are people with huge potential and great hopes. So we would like to say:

To our parents, we love you. We know a lot of you are doing the best you can, and we appreciate this. We understand that you don't know everything. It's okay to ask for help. But there are some of you who are failing us and who are not being

good role models. The use of drugs and alcohol among some of you affects us negatively.

Maybe life has been hard on you. But please take responsibility. Be present. Parent us, and talk to us. Help us find information. Instead of telling us what we're doing wrong, show us how to do things right. Our learning starts at home.

Don't try to make us live out your dream. We have our own dreams. Please be there for us. Don't judge us. We know that we have flaws and many of us make mistakes, so let us try to find a way to work this out together. We need your love and support and encouragement to be the best we can be. We will do our best to make you proud.

To our teachers, we need you to teach us, every day. Please reinforce positivity, believe in us and show us the way. We will surprise you, because we want this education that you can give us. But please don't call us stupid, because some of us will

Young people face multiple challenges—from crime and poverty to school dropout, teen pregnancy, substance abuse and unemployment. These problems are all interconnected and require solutions involving multiple duty-bearers. This extract from YouthMatters captures young people's energy and creativity, and calls on government, business and civil society to step up support for youth development.

end up believing it. You are our role models, and you have a powerful influence on us. So teach us, have faith in us and be patient, explain the things we do not understand.

When you love your job, you can teach us what it means to be passionate.

To the nurses we meet at the clinics, we appreciate your knowledge and your care, but please treat us without judgment. Some of us would rather endure the pain than go to a clinic because of the treatment we get there! When we come to you for information or care, we need you to be professional. Keep our visits confidential. That way we know it is safe to return to the clinic to get the help we need. We need

your compassion, your support, your respect and patience.

To our communities, we need you to be united with us so we can fight the problems out there together. Do not think of us as a lost generation. We are young, we may explore and experiment, but with your guidance we can find our way. Please accept us for who we are and as though we were your own.

A child is raised by the community. Don't isolate the ones who need your help the most.

To the government, we do see your efforts, but we need you to find better ways to provide the services that you have promised – like equal and quality education, effective, youth-friendly and affordable health

care, and job opportunities. It is no use having programmes to help us if we don't know how to access them.

All government services should put the people first. All political parties should work as a team to make this country move forward – we do not benefit from your fights!

To businesses, some of you have reached out and sponsored us with bursaries, for which we are grateful. But we ask you to take an extra step. We would appreciate it if you could visit us and spend some face-to-face time with us.

We need positive role models to talk to us about the world of work and the expectations of employers. Provide us with as many job shadow options and opportunities as possible.

ble. Be our mentors, our motivators.

To the drug dealers, enough is enough! Stop destroying us. How would you feel if someone sold the most dangerous drug to your child?

To the police, we know it's not easy for you out there, we know many of you give your best to protect us. But we expect you not to take bribes. We ask those of you who are unhappy to implement the change you want to see in your department. If you need more resources, training and manpower, then ask for them. Take your work seriously and protect the citizens of this country.

To our peers, learn self-love and self-respect, because with that anything is possible. The positive change we speak of can only happen when we take ourselves seriously and we take up the opportunities that are out there. Go and look for them, make them work for you.

Don't give up or sit back. Things will not just come to you. Don't fear failure – it is part of the learning

process. Try, try and try again. We all need to do our best, because people are always learning from us. Don't be negative about where you are or where you come from. None of that determines where you are going. Be positive. Dream big. And don't let anything get you down.

To all of you, join the movement of change. And remember to join us in creative excitement – we will surprise you!

● *The YouthMatters bulletin was developed by the Children's Institute and Poverty and Inequality Initiative, UCT, and IkamvaYouth in collaboration with 18 young South Africans who debated the critical issues with other young people in their communities before feeding their broader insights into the bulletin. It accompanies the South African Child Gauge 2015, which addresses youth and the intergenerational cycle of poverty, and is available on www.ci.org.za.*