

## **Children in Difficult Circumstances: A South African Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT** Throughout the world, a great many children face severe hardships, particularly those who are encumbered with disabilities. Although commendable legal and policy reforms have been introduced in an attempt to cater for the needs and the best interests of children, at present their effectiveness is being hindered by the inability of those structures which are tasked with meeting the needs of children to provide adequate support for their optimal well-being and development. Consequently, the gains which are to be expected from reforms in terms of legislation and policy frameworks remain theoretical gains, as actual practice tends to resist the successful implementation of these reforms to provide adequate assistance to children with disabilities. Some of the significant shortcomings of practice are evident in the shortage of educational institutions with the requisite specialised skills and humane environments to cater for children with special needs and the financial difficulties which the additional costs which are entailed in enabling these children to achieve an acceptable standard of living in their adult lives. It is the considered opinion of the authors of this paper that both the government and other relevant stakeholders need to make a coordinated and concerted effort to ensure that rates of dropping out of schools are minimised, families are strengthened and schools equipped with support systems to accommodate disabled children.