

The Business Life

Pitying the poor children doesn't help

Tomorrow Trust CEO defines success very differently from the way it is viewed, generally, in the world, writes Sue Blaine

It's when I ask Kim Feinberg to tell me a little about her childhood that it all falls into place.

"Ah, yes, I had a tough upbringing. There was a lot of rejection and abandonment from a young age," says the CEO of Tomorrow Trust, a non-governmental organisation that spends its time and money educating orphaned and vulnerable children so they grow up as useful members of society. Feinberg's father was badly injured in an aircraft crash when she was very young and her mother was unable to look after her and her siblings, so Feinberg was sent to live with an aunt.

That, she says, is why she's spent her working life trying to ensure that everyone has a chance to succeed and it is, in essence, what all three of her books have been about.

The latest, *Raising Wisdom: For the Love of our Children*, a collection of the hopes, wants and dreams of 48 people, including celebrities of the ilk of Magic Johnson, Anthony Hopkins and Bryce Courtenay, "for the world's children". Feinberg wants everyone to have a copy.

"I want everyone to get to a stage in life when they want more for themselves, and the rest of humankind."

It's enormously evident that this is Feinberg's passion, and that SA is the better for it.

"It is about consciousness and potentiality. There is nothing worse than untapped potential that can go to waste. People say you must be so self-fulfilled, but what I live with most of my life is anxiety and frustration. I am satisfied because I love doing what I do, but I'm not self-fulfilled because every day I wake up with someone we are saying no to."

Feinberg founded the Tomorrow Trust in 2005, originally to help orphaned and vulnerable children get post-school education. Then it was realised their school-leaving results were often neither good enough, nor indicative of their potential. Often they did not even get into tertiary education. Enter the trust, which helps these youngsters through high school, giving them extra tuition; helps them get a post-school qualification; and helps them become independent of charity by ensuring they get a job.

"I've got a Limpopo student who is the first of his extended family to pass grade 8. He's changed the history of his



INSIGHT: Kim Feinberg says children want adults to take responsibility for their actions. Picture: MARTIN RHODES

family. Now he's at Stellenbosch studying dentistry. When we took him there he'd never been in a taxi, never ordered in a restaurant. I was so worried about him, but he aced his first year. Why? Because we held him all the way. We were on the phone to him all the time telling him he could do this. That's what our kids need, someone to believe in them."

That, in case you are feeling smug, goes for the middle and upper classes too. Raising Wisdom is an exploration of what all children want.

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"I wanted to look at kids in the US and SA to see if their basic needs are the same. They are. They want love, real love.

"They want support and encouragement, someone there for them, someone to trust them so they can create a new reality.

day: "I would like to write a book, but there is nothing more powerful than getting the message from the source. It's always been there, but it's been like an edge, a precipice and I've never crossed that boundary. What would I write about? Would people like it? Also, I'd have to give up doing this... I feel I am on the right path. I know this is my passion and my soul journey. It is a privilege to be doing what I love."

Feinberg was a founding director of SA's Apartheid Museum, sat on the Human Rights Commission for Education, and was founding CEO of the Tolerance Foundation that teaches children life skills based on the history of apartheid, the Holocaust and the Rwandan and Albanian genocides. She also represents film maker Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Institute. She won the Education Charter International's 2009 Global Education Award and that year was also runner up in the South African Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

All these are the external accolades of success, but Feinberg defines success very differently from the way it is viewed, generally, in the world.

"Success is facing our fears in the most positive way and overcoming them. It's not wealth, there are plenty of wealthy, unhappy people, plenty



of beautiful people." She sees *Raising Wisdom* as a step away from her two previous books, one on orphans and the other on what it is like to be an HIV-positive mother.

"It's something different. All my books deal with issues that need to be out there, but this one is about the adult choices that affect children. Very seldom do adults think, 'What is my legacy? What am I leaving behind?' I have two children, aged 20 and 24, and even now my choices affect them. For example, if I was to get into another relationship after my divorce, where is that going to take me, and their needs?"

"This book deals with subjects like love. What is love? Books, movies, advertising — there are all these consensus realities about how you should be to get love, how you should look. Look at what's in the news now. The status quo and what's worked in the past doesn't work any more. The world is a very different place. Adults wanted a good career, money, a car, a house, maybe to travel overseas once a year. Kids don't want so much any more. They are calling for accountability, responsibility, and an end to lies, fraud and greedy leaders."

Considering events in the Middle East and North Africa, I have to ask: "How, then, do you explain the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League?" Feinberg gasps. "Nothing like throwing me into boiling water!"

"People have forgotten that the ANC was an intellectual group. Madiba, Sisulu... The people coming forward haven't kept that intellectual core. A lot of them have lost their way. Many South African youths have not moved into critical thinking. They just vote, they haven't learnt to take responsibility for their future."

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