**A:** We are living in a difficult time where we are witnessing the gradual decline of the very fabric of our society. As a country, we’re going through a transitional phase. There was a time when we all believed in the concept of opportunity and there were many platforms that communicated this. Over time, those who chased these opportunities have often not had the ability to articulate that they still exist to the generations that have followed. Our current social paradigm is an input of so many different facets; the shifting political and economic landscape along with natural progression determines different opportunities. How and what is communicated about these opportunities have often not had the platforms that communicated this. Over time, various perspectives have emerged, which surprisingly reflects our perception of “opportunity” – and that for and of our children.

**Q:** How is each of us being called to lead – not to become iconic leaders of the likes of Mandela but rather within our own communities and circles of excellence?

**A:** This is an interesting question because I’m one of the people who is probably least affected by the Mandela phenomenon. While he did a great thing for our nation, his iconic leadership simultaneously created the unfortunate ideology, especially within the greater population, that leadership is defined by the ability to do something major for the masses. In my personal experience, I have found that leadership is exhibited on a very micro level by people in communities who do things that often don’t have broad appeal and yet, on an accumulative basis, have a much greater impact on society than many of our more public “leaders”.

Another reason why leaders such as Mandela have become so revered is that we have a desperate shortage of leaders in our country. There just aren’t enough people who are willing to stand up and change the course of where we are going as a society. Increasingly, whenever issues of national concern are raised, the only person speaking to my generation and the generations that follow, is a guy called Julius. For me, he’s a remarkable leader because, by staying in touch at a grassroots level, he’s getting the masses on his side. Having identified that he exhibits leadership, the question then becomes if we’re comfortable with him being the type of leader that the students are following. If the answer is “no” and we aren’t comfortable with it, there’s no reason why we can’t step into that space and say, “Here is an alternative for your thinking.” It’s a paradigm shift and a very awkward space we find ourselves in as a country because we really need to find a way to evolve our concept of leadership to respond to the times.

Leadership can no longer look to legacy and new vision in the children’s sector. It cannot continue running historically but must become dynamic and respond to a new audience. Leadership must pursue the human face of CSI. We need “new” leaders with the ability to step up, to find the zones of discomfort and neglected areas, and say: “This is what we need to fix.” Now that would be the type of leader I could hang out with!

**HARD WORK IS IMPORTANT. THIS IS WHAT OUR COUNTRY HAS FORGOTTEN.**

Too many children and youth in South Africa face poverty and isolation due to the HIV/AIDS crisis and related problems such as poor education and a lack of job opportunities. Despite having one of the world’s best legal frameworks for the wellbeing of children and extensive governmental and nongovernmental programmes, there remains a gap in social equity and the delivery of social services. Overstretched organisations, individuals battling with overwhelming need in the context of bureaucratic systems, funding shortages, insufficient human capital, lack of co-ordination within the sector and burnout among practitioners are all obstacles to fulfilling South Africa’s promise to its children.
Build trust, relationships and collaboration with opportunities to:

- Improve the quality and quantity of services to children by supporting LINC aims to improve the quality and quantity of services to children by supporting 11-million children.
- Support 100 Fellows, whose organisations reach South Africa. The network numbers nearly government, business, academia, civil society and funders working on children’s issues in South Africa. The network numbers nearly 110 Fellows, whose organisations reach about 11-million children.
- Serve as a model for promoting collaboration among government, business and civil society leaders in addressing other critical issues and sectors in South Africa.

LINC uses the concept (pioneered by Synergos and its partners) of “bridging leadership” – leadership that creates and sustains collaboration – as a key framework. Fellows nurture competencies such as acknowledging ownership, systemic analysis of complex situations, creating a shared vision, and collective action that enhances effective collaboration.

**Activities and impact**

LINC offers individual professional coaching and support to regional groups through quarterly peer-learning sessions. It also offers national convenings, with LINC Fellows meeting each year for a multi-day residential retreat in a space conducive to promoting peer support. These retreats serve not only as opportunities for leadership development, but also allow the collective harvesting of knowledge in the children’s sector and for building personal connections that can form the seeds of collaboration and prototype promising innovations.

LINC Fellows have shown measured improvements in bridging leadership capacities such as personal, collaborative and sectoral mastery. They have also reported an increased interest in collaboration within the children’s sector and more collaboration across organisations.

**Structure and approach**

**Leadership and Innovation Network for Collaboration in the Children’s Sector (LINC)** is a network that brings together practitioners/stakeholders from government, business, academia, civil society and funders working on children’s issues in South Africa. The network numbers nearly 110 Fellows, whose organisations reach about 11-million children.

LINC aims to improve the quality and quantity of services to children by supporting LINC aims to improve the quality and quantity of services to children by supporting 11-million children.

### Origins

The idea of LINC started in the mid-2000s with social entrepreneur and Synergos Senior Fellow Ann Lamont who worked in a partnership with a process specialist Mike Bojer of Rees Social Innovation and Synergos South Africa (part of Synergos, a global nonprofit organisation). In 2006 research was conducted into the needs and perspectives of key stakeholders in the children’s sector for the purposes of designing the organisation. Key concerns that were identified included:

- Government faced significant challenges in implementation, integration and leadership;
- Government players often felt misunderstood by other players;
- Community-based organisations were generally welfare-driven and tended to be short term in their outlook as they aimed to meet immediate needs;
- NGOs struggled with competition for funding, duplication of activity, short-term planning, as well as limited capacity and skills. Sometimes they needed to juggle conflicts between funder requirements and what they saw as their beneficiaries’ real needs;
- A key challenge for large funders was how to channel funding to the local level. When co-operation and communication among global funders were limited, they inadvertently fostered competition rather than co-operation among their grantees;
- There was a general lack of academic research on how complex social innovations go to scale at national level, beyond normal centralised policy approaches; and
- The child sector was not sufficiently profiled as an area of attention with media not fully utilised to focus relevant issues in a strategic way.

Analysis of this research revealed that alignment around four key areas – systems thinking, innovation, collaboration and leadership – could yield definite improvement.

LINC was subsequently formally launched in 2007 as a partnership among Synergos, Convene Venture Philanthropy, Rees Social Innovation and the South African Department of Social Development. Initial funding came largely from the Hollard Foundation and the Capricorn (later Yellowwood) investment fund. In 2011, Synergos took on the full role of convening Synergos’ LINC Programme Manager Renald Morris and managing LINC. Underlying LINC are three key beliefs:

- The problems in the children’s sector are complex, and it is thus essential that stakeholders seek to understand and address that complexity;
- It isn’t possible for any one stakeholder or type of stakeholder to address these problems alone – collaboration is vital. Multistakeholder collaboration underpinned the creation of LINC and is a key part of its programming and approach;
- Organisational and sectoral changes are not possible without personal and professional development of leaders within the sector.

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**The LINC network and approach continues to have value within the children’s sector and may serve as a model for promoting collaboration among government, business and civil society to address other critical issues and sectors in South Africa.**
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From CSI Perspectives 2015

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