

Top award for kids' advocate

INNOVATING: Ann Skelton's 25 year battle acknowledged by World's Children

CHILD justice Ann Skelton has received a World's Children's Honorary Award for her 25-year battle for the rights of children affected by the justice system.

Skelton has done groundbreaking work for South Africa's children both in the court rooms and by changing laws affecting children.

When Nelson Mandela became president, she was asked to chair the committee writing of the new law protecting children in trouble with the law.



Ann Skelton, decades of legal battles on behalf of children.

She has assisted, for an example, a child in a divorce case, a child mistreated at a children's home, an unaccompanied refugee child, children being ill-treated in prison and children in "mud schools" in bad conditions.

This work has reached further than the individual children in the particular cases, it has also helped and protected all South Africa's children in similar situations.

Skelton is a director of the Centre for Child Law at the University of

Pretoria.

Sakena Yacobi of Afghanistan also received the World's Children's Honorary Award for her long and often dangerous fight for girls' right to education.

The hardline Islamist Taliban, which once ruled the country, did not recognise this right for girls.

The World's Children Prize Foundation stated that 2.5 million children chose their child rights hero in a global vote during hundreds of World's Children's Press Conferenc-

es, held all over the world this week. It went to Anna Mollel of Tanzania, for her more than 20-year struggle for Maasai children with disabilities.

Mollel became the child rights hero and the recipient of the 2012 World's Children's Prize for Rights.

The previous prize laureates include the children's Decade Child Rights Heroes Graça Machel and Nelson Mandela, Hector Pieterse and Nkosi Johnson (both posthumously).

— Witness Reporter.

Centre to join fray in child grant dispute

ZELDA VENTER
HIGH COURT REPORTER

THE CENTRE for Child Law is expected to apply as a friend of the court in an application to the Pretoria High Court tomorrow regarding a R10 billion contract to manage the nationwide distribution of social grants to millions of underprivileged people, including children.

Absa subsidiary Allpay Consolidated Investment Holdings will ask the court to review a tender awarded by the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa) to a company Cash Paymaster Services to manage the distribution of the social grants countrywide.

Allpay is claiming the awarding of the tender was "fraught with irregularities".

Dr Ann Skelton of the Centre

for Child Law, however, is concerned about the millions of children who are reliant on social grants. The centre's main concern is that the dispute over the awarding of the tender may cause a disruption of payment to the beneficiaries.

In her application, Skelton said that on February 29, 10 789 595 children were receiving child support grants, while 524 378 were receiving foster child grants. About 114 000 children were receiving care dependency grants.

"It is in the circumstances safe to say that children are the (biggest) interest group that benefit from grants. (Their) interests should play an important role in the determination of this case."

Skelton said the court should weigh the interests of the beneficiaries and the public in balanc-

ing the rights of the litigants in this application.

She suggested that, as the children are the largest group who benefit from these government grants, the current tender holder should continue with payments as that is the least disruptive process.

Once the final decision is made - if a different company is to be appointed to manage the grant payouts - there must be a reasonable handover period to ensure payments are not interrupted, she said.

The centre earlier asked Sassa for a comprehensive plan which covers the possibility of the tender award being set aside. Skelton said the plan issued fell short.

Neither parties in the tender dispute have objections to the centre assisting the court regarding the plight of the children.

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