



Once Upon a Future

ANNUAL

2025/26

REPORT



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Executive Summary

Ten years ago, in 2015, we launched the Awake Youth Initiative with a bold vision: to advance the potential, leadership, and livelihoods of children and youth in Kenya's under-resourced communities. Today, we celebrate a decade of impact, marked by a pivotal shift in our 2025/26 reporting year. We have scaled our reach and deepened our interventions through a "co-creation" model that ensures no young person is left behind.

Core Program Milestones

01 Awake Changemaker School

To ensure transformative impact, we implemented a comprehensive three-pillar model. We "Came to School" by doubling our sponsorship capacity to 30 children; "Stayed in School" by providing over 2,000 nutritious meals, ensuring physical stability for learning; and "Thrived in School" by introducing coding classes, launching new climate action projects, and investing KES 450,000 in CBC-compliant textbooks. Furthermore, we conducted foundational mental health research in Mathare to better support our students' psychological well-being, both in the classroom and at home.



02 Lead Young Program

This year, our signature program celebrated its **10th anniversary**, a milestone commemorated at Nova Pioneer.



We proudly inaugurated the 2026/2027 cohort of 40 ambitious grassroots change makers, all of whom are now equipped with the 6-month intensive leadership curriculum required to transform their communities.



03

**Awake
Youth
Konnekt**

Launched in 2025 in partnership with CMETrust and PaaMoja, this program is our most strategic addition yet. It supports the representation of "last-mile" changemakers from Mathare in critical local, regional, and international spaces.

This year, we convened 50+ community-led founders at our Youth Konnekt Summit, featuring industry leaders Janet Mbugua and Abel Mutua while successfully connecting 50+ participants to global platforms like the UN Youth Environment Assembly and Ashoka Changemaker Barazas.

Message from the Leadership



Meshack Otieno
Founder & CEO

From the founder

"Ten years ago, the dream for Awake was born from a singular conviction: to improve the livelihoods of informal settlements by empowering the most promising young generation as architects of change. As we step into our second decade, our mission has evolved into a dedicated effort to transform the leading, living, and learning experiences of youth in Nairobi's underserved communities. Our work is now explicitly aligned with the global mandate of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). By bridging the gap between grassroots potential and global opportunity through our new Awake Youth Konnekt program, we are proving that when last-mile communities are given access to the table, they do not just participate, they lead. This year, through the theme 'ONCE UPON A FUTURE,' we look at the world through a new lens."



Ines Yabar
Board Chair

From the Board Chair

"It has been a privilege to join the Awake Youth Initiative Board at such a pivotal moment. As Awake enters its second decade, the Board's primary focus is to provide the governance framework that allows Awake to scale its impact effectively. This 2025–2027 strategy is built on a decade of experience, a proactive vision for the future, and the belief that more can be done in partnership with networks across the continent."

By marrying grassroots passion with top-tier strategic oversight, Awake will set a new benchmark for youth-led development. I am looking forward to supporting Awake as the team continues to demonstrate Youth Leadership in Action and plants the seeds for this future we are not only dreaming but building."



Consolata Nekesa
Director of Programs

From the Director of Programs

"Joining Awake Youth Initiatives this year has felt like stepping into something I didn't have full words for yet, one of the most clarifying experiences of my career. What caught my eye was the 2026 Lead Young Program recruitment. The intentionality behind who we reached and how. The recruitment process was just not mere selection but more where young people felt genuinely seen.

Longer I sit and chat with the changemakers at Awake, especially the 2026 cohort, listening to them articulate their dreams; they carry a hunger so real, urgent and community-rooted.

Watching that hunger actively sharpen into vision, into voice, into action is why I do what I do - I stay reminded that the future isn't something we hand young people, It's something we all have the privilege of building alongside us all.."



Saru Duckworth
Strategic Advisor to the
CEO

From the C.E.O Strategic Advisor

"I'm excited to join Awake at a moment of reflection and ambition, as the organization evolves from a community-rooted Changemaker School in Mathare into an open, scalable changemaker education model for informal settlements both near and far.

I'm especially inspired to support the CEO in strengthening the Open Changemaker Curriculum, training educators and youth facilitators in informal settlements, and building a sustainable model that pairs paid curriculum adoption with free access for low-resource schools and informal settlement communities."



Core Program Performance

Awake Changemaker School: A Three-Pillar Evolution

Come to School (Access): We reached a new milestone by onboarding 30 new sponsored students, bringing our total cohort to 70 children who are now off the streets and in the classroom.

Stay in School (Retention): Recognising that hunger is the primary barrier to education in informal settlements, we provided over 2,000 nutritious breakfast and lunch meals, ensuring that our students possess the physical stability required to learn.

Thrive in School (Quality): We invested Kes 450,000 in CBC-compliant textbooks to sharpen the delivery of instruction. Our curriculum now includes 48 immersive coding sessions (in partnership with Oasis Mathare) and 14 Climate Action sessions, which served as the foundation for the Climate Bridge Group, a student-led initiative formed in partnership with international allies from Germany and the American University.

Awake Lead Young: 10 Years of Audacity

Strategic Growth: By entering into a new partnership with the Canada Mathare Education Trust (CMETrust), we tapped into an expansive network, resulting in 100+ applications. This enabled us to increase our annual intake from 30 to 40 participants.

Ready for Impact: Baseline assessments of the 2026 cohort reveal high-level foundational competencies, with participants demonstrating strong communication skills, collaborative mindsets, and a growth-oriented approach toward our 6-month curriculum in leadership, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.

Awake Youth Konnekt (Plug Mtaani): Bridging the Last Mile

Plug Mtaani turned one year old this reporting period:

Global Representation: 5 grassroots changemakers were supported to represent their communities at the United Nations Youth Environment Assembly.

Community Exposure: Over 50 changemakers participated in the Ashoka Changemaker Baraza Series, fostering cross-community learning.

Capacity Building: Through our partnership with Youth Lite, 30 changemakers accessed high-level masterclasses.

Special Milestone:

Pioneering Mental Health in Mathare



In the 2025/26 period, Awake Youth Initiative (AYI) took a decisive step toward holistic child development by launching a foundational Mental Health Baseline Study within Mathare Sub-County. Led by our Wellbeing & Safeguarding Lead, Mediantrics Doris, this research provides the empirical blueprint for our new wellbeing curriculum, ensuring that our interventions are not just compassionate, but evidence-based.

The Research Context

The study involved 129 pupils across two local schools, Awake Changemaker School and Furaha Community Academy through comprehensive Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews. The initiative aimed to understand the mental state of children within both home and school environments to better support their academic retention and overall psychological growth.

Key Findings: The Barriers to Well being

The data highlighted four critical areas where children are struggling, often silently:

Domestic Violence: Identified as the primary driver of trauma, causing children to live in constant fear and suffer from symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Poverty: Lack of basic needs leads to deep-seated inferiority complexes and low self-esteem as students compare themselves to their more fortunate peers.

Emotionally Unavailable Parents: A lack of affection, affirmation, and reassurance at home leaves children vulnerable to feelings of rejection and trust issues.

Academic Pressure & Harsh Discipline: Negative experiences with punitive teaching methods lead to student isolation, academic avoidance, and lack of motivation.

Our Commitment to Intervention

This research is not merely a report; it is a call to action. AYI is actively implementing the following interventions to create a safer environment for our learners:

Parental Engagement: Hosting open forums and monthly parent-child engagement sessions to strengthen family bonds and promote mental health awareness.

School-Based Support: Partnering with teachers to normalize conversations around mental health and implementing dedicated Guidance and Counselling days.

Holistic Curriculum: Integrating findings from this study into a specialized wellbeing curriculum that addresses the physical, emotional, and social needs of our students.



Mediantrics
Doris,
Wellbeing &
Safeguarding Lead.

"Conducting this baseline study was both insightful and eye-opening. It revealed that many children in Mathare face significant challenges that impact their mental wellbeing, with domestic violence emerging as the most prevalent concern. This exercise underscored the critical importance of creating safe spaces where children can freely express themselves, feel heard and receive the support they need. While the report provides valuable insights and a strong foundation for meaningful interventions, I am deeply reminded that one of the most powerful aspects of being human is healing alongside others or within supportive communities that foster understanding and care. It is okay not to be okay, but it is not okay to remain unsupported or unheard. Healing is possible and together we can create environments where every child has the opportunity to heal, grow and thrive. Care begins with you and me, because every child matters."

Financial Stewardship & Resource Mobilization

The 2025/26 Financial Journey: A Year of Grit and Growth

Operating with a budget of KES 15M, we navigated a challenging funding landscape where major institutional grants were limited. The majority of our support came from individual donors and community champions, a testament to the trust built over the last decade.

The Roadmap to Sustainability

Strategic Capital Expenditures

Educational Excellence: We invested KES 450,000+ in new CBC-compliant textbooks.

Direct Community Support: We deployed KES 200,000+ in direct donations and essential welfare support.

Operational Resilience: Resources were strictly prioritized to sustain the Changemaker School and Lead Young programs.

Strategic Resource Mobilization: Every member of our new 2025–2027 Advisory Board has been tasked with driving specific fundraising initiatives.

Broadening the Donor Base: We are engaging new institutional partners aligned with SDG 1 and SDG 4.

Community-Led Growth: Leveraging the Plug Mtaani model to lower operational costs via peer-driven networks.



generation in human history.

Awake identifies, promotes and connects communities most impactful young leaders to create better communities, with more responsible, more effective leadership.

Awake Youth Quake: Igniting the Future

The Awake Youth Quake was a high-intensity investment in the visibility and credibility of our changemakers.

Strategic Resource Mobilization: Every member of our new 2025–2027 Advisory Board has been tasked with driving specific fundraising initiatives.

Broadening the Donor Base: We are engaging new institutional partners aligned with SDG 1 and SDG 4.

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Strategic Outlook Our Path Forward

G.I.V.E.S.

Our scaling strategy remains anchored in the G.I.V.E.S. pillars (Grow, Impact, Value, Evidence, and Sustain), adapted for 2026:

Grow: Strengthening alliances with CMETrust, Safaricom Hook, Cogwheel Creations Studios, and CRVPF.

Impact: Fully operationalizing our "Come to School, Stay in School, Thrive in School" model.

Value: Launching the "Ultimate Awake Youth Toolkit" for "last-mile" changemakers.

Evidence: Institutionalizing data-driven decision-making derived from our wellbeing research.

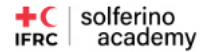
Sustain: Pivoting toward income-generating revenue streams to ensure long-term independence.



A DECADE OF TRANSFORMING THE LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Our 2025/26 Partners



Acknowledgments

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Awake Youth Initiative Team, our volunteers/interns, and our community champions. To our donors and the partner school, thank you for your belief in our mission.

"In every challenge, we found a partner. In every barrier, we found a path. To everyone who walked with us this year: thank you for helping us echo, once again, 'Awake for every changemaker'."

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