CYEC ZFI

Zawadi Fund International



2024-25 Biennial Report

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Background and Mission

The Children and Youth Empowerment Centre (CYEC), Nyeri, is a dynamic and innovative residential and educational program for street-dwelling children and other highly vulnerable young people in Kenya. Created in 2006 as a public-private initiative to address specific gaps in the care and support of disadvantaged children and youth, the CYEC is partnering with local civic organizations, the private sector and Kenyan and U.S. universities to find ***effective, sustainable solutions*** for this population.

The Rathithi Polytechnic was established in 2019 to provide additional educational opportunities for youth from the Centre and the community, preparing them to be skilled, engaged leaders in their communities.

The Children and Youth Empowerment Centre (CYEC) is focused on the comprehensive development of its target population, including life skills and entrepreneurship training, to enable these young people to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Zawadi Fund International partners with the CYEC to create innovative models for program sustainability, including mobilizing local resources and developing entrepreneurial initiatives for the Centre and its affiliated programs.

Zawadi Fund International (ZFI) was established in 2009 as a US-based non-profit organization to support the CYEC and affiliated programs in Kenya. 'Zawadi' is the Swahili word for 'gift' and was selected to represent our desire to develop the gifts of each young person for the betterment of their community.

2024-2025 Accomplishments and Activities

We've seen steady progress across our programs in the past two years. The Polytechnic hosted its first graduation ceremony in 2025, and the Centre continued to provide education, care and support to vulnerable children both in residence and in the community. Across all our programs, with your support, we cared for, educated and empowered 210 young people in 2025!

Education and Centre Life

In 2025, we had 65 children in primary and junior school (22 girls and 43 boys) and 48 in high school (18 girls and 30 boys). Seven of our young adults were in college and another 13 were at the polytechnic in Rathithi, along with 61 local youth. We took in 29 children from the streets (or who were at high risk of being pushed to the streets) and 12 of our children rejoined their extended families while continuing to receive financial support and guidance from the Centre. An additional 15 youth were also supported by the Centre as they started small businesses, volunteered at the Centre and/or prepared for employment or further education.



In addition to academics, our students participate in co-curricular activities including soccer, agricultural production, arts, acrobatics, community service, religious engagement, reading club, and cooking. We appreciate the ability to provide our young people with opportunities for growth, self-awareness and life-skills development!

Thanks to support of donors, we installed solar panels in 2024, reducing our electricity bill at the Centre significantly. We also built a playground for the youngest children, giving them a safe place to play and stay healthy!

Alumni Giving Back

Alumni of the Centre appreciate the foundation the Centre gave them for their lives – education, care and love. Each of the past two years, CYEC alumni have returned to share with the children. Together they played games, prepared food and shared stories of their time at the Centre and what they're doing now. Our graduates are role models and mentors for the younger children, showing them a path to a bright future. In addition, while many of our alumni are still getting established, it's valuable for them to have the opportunity to share and give back.



Medical Clinic

Our medical clinic continues to serve both our Centre and the community. All of our children are screened as they enter the program, and our clinic provides check-ups, vaccinations and basic healthcare. Our clinic also provides basic care for the community, enabling our neighbors to receive care and strengthening our community connections. ZFI helps purchase medicines and supplies for the clinic so this critical work can continue!

Rathithi Polytechnic

We held our first graduation ceremony in December 2025, recognizing our graduates from the prior two years. For many of our students, this was the first graduation ceremony they (or a family member) had ever experienced, so they were very excited and proud!



We had 74 students in 2025, 13 from the CYEC and the remainder from the local area. This was a slight decrease in enrollment from prior years, due to challenging economic times making it difficult for local families to pay the fees. Our school plays a critical role for young people and the community as it gives students both the technical and leadership skills to be able to provide for themselves and contribute to their communities.

The exceptionally high rates of unemployment (and underemployment) for young people in Kenya, which is even higher for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, means there is need for special effort to ensure our young people are prepared for their futures. Our programs include catering, tailoring, information and communication technology, masonry and plumbing, electrical technician, welding, hairdressing and beauty therapy, all with life-skills and leadership. Our agriculture program provides vegetables and milk for the poly and the Centre, as well as income from higher value production.

We had 69 students take national exams for technical certification. Of these, 67 students passed, including 33 (48%) who received First Class Honors, demonstrating the high quality of instruction and student dedication. All 11 of our trainers participated in professional development in pedagogy, and a team-building retreat was held.

The polytechnic integrates business skills with vocational training, ensuring sustainability and student empowerment. There are several income-generating activities, as the tailoring students provide uniforms for the CYEC, the polytechnic and other local schools, providing a steady stream of income and valuable experience for the students. The catering program also provides service to the local community, generating income and providing the students with real-world hospitality experiences. In addition, the poly purchased a screen-printing machine and trained six staff and students in its use. They have produced t-shirts for local events.

Community Engagement

Our library provides activities and events for the local community. We seek to foster a love of learning, especially among children, so our regular outreach programs include story time, board games, art and spelling bees. Our computer lab allows us to integrate basic computer skills into the programs, helping to bridge the digital divide.

All of our students and other youth from the community participated in Ajira Digital training, gaining on-demand skills such as digital marketing, data entry, and content writing, enhancing their employability.



In 2024, we provided a three-month program in catering for a local women's group. They have successfully created a catering business, leveraging their new skills in the culinary sector.

Othaya Eco-Village



The site of our eco-village, Othaya has a beautiful natural environment, and one of our main income-generating activities will be eco-tourism, with hiking, river rafting and biking, as well as agri-tourism. We have built traditional huts for guest housing, a kitchen facility, a dining hall and latrines. The fertile agricultural land at Othaya produces a variety of vegetables for the Centre and is a key component of our efforts to produce much of the food needed for our program. We prioritize healthy produce, including orange and purple sweet potatoes, high in Vitamin A.

Partnerships

The Centre continues to benefit from the network of partnerships it has created to bring together creative, dedicated people and institutions to develop and implement innovative programs. Key among these are US and Kenyan universities including Penn State University, Kansas State University, and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. These collaborations help young people learn and grow and form genuine connections across cultures!

Alumni of the Centre have established a group that supports the Centre through holding events, mentoring and fundraising. This organization is growing to include young people from the community as well.

The Zawadi Society is a Kenyan organization through which local civic groups, businesses, religious bodies and individuals support the Centre's programs through volunteering, mentoring, financial or in-kind support. The CYEC is a valued local institution!

2026 Priorities and Initiatives

This year marks 20 years since the Children and Youth Empowerment Centre was established. We are heartened to see the young people who have come through our programs thrive as young adults – working, raising families and contributing to their communities. Your support has made this possible!

In 2026, one of our priorities is developing the agricultural training and outreach program at the polytechnic. While the Kenyan economy is highly dependent on agriculture, soils have become depleted over years of heavy use. We are establishing a Centre of Excellence in Regenerative Agriculture to provide formal education in regenerative agriculture, along with outreach to local farmers.

In addition, we will continue to provide transformative opportunities for vulnerable children, ensuring they have a safe place to call home while they learn and grow. Please join in this commitment to our shared future by supporting the vital work of the CYEC as you are able.



Zawadi Fund International 2024-2025 Financial Statement

Donations	**2024**	**2025**
Direct donations	$155,918.63	$153,824.26
Indirect donations (Global Giving & Network for Good)	$10,482.93	$10,823.04
Total Income	**$166,401.56**	**$164,647.30**
Expenses		
Dispersal to CYEC	**$180,775.17**	**$157,295.58**
Residential care	97,007.97	79,220.51*
Education	23,576.84	21,903.62
Enterprise Development and Infrastructure (including poly)	60,190.36	56,171.45
Business expenses (PA registration, website, software, etc.)	$878.60	$1,447.43
Bank, transfer and on-line collection fees	$964.58	$1,110.59
Total Expenses	**$182,618.35**	**$159,853.60**
Net Change in Assets	$-16,216.79	$4,793.70
Assets at the beginning of the year	$22,207.01	$5,990.22
Assets at the end of the year	$5,990.22	$10,783.92

*Residential care was reduced by in-kind donations.

ZFI has no paid staff, keeping our overhead expenses to a minimum. That means your donations go straight to support the children and programming at the CYEC!

CYEC ZFI

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