



ARCHDIOCESE OF NYERI TUMAINI ST THORLAK AUTISM CENTRE NEWSLETTER



THE DAY SHE SAID “DADDY”

For years, Anthony Muya raised his autistic daughter in near silence—hers, and his own. This is a story about denial, devotion, and the slow, deliberate work of becoming the father a child needs, with the steady guidance of a centre that helped make progress possible.

The word came without warning. Muya had just walked into a Nanyuki restaurant where his daughter sat with his mother. She looked up, recognised him, and said it, clear, simple and unmistakable.

“Daddy!” She was six years old and had been largely non-verbal her entire life. For years, he had been waiting, though he would not have admitted it. The moment did not repeat itself that day, but something shifted. Over time, the word returned when she saw him, when she needed something, when she was excited. It became a rhythm, a connection. For him, it was enough

For many parents, this is a passing milestone. For Muya, it marked the outcome of years of quiet persistence at home, and within the structured support of Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre, where his daughter’s voice had slowly begun to emerge.

He first sensed something was different when she was about two and a half. She was not speaking, but he assumed she would catch up. That belief held until a visit to a friend with an autistic son. Watching the girl’s movements including tiptoeing, and covering her ears, Muya began to recognise the same patterns at home. It was the first time autism became real.

Acceptance did not come quickly. The diagnosis brought uncertainty, not clarity. He held on to the hope that therapy might make it disappear, that things would somehow return to normal. Like many families, they searched for alternative explanations. Her sensitivity to sound led them to suspect a hearing issue, and she was admitted to hospital.

In hindsight, he understands this as denial, a search for something simpler and fixable.

He was unprepared, and he knew it. There was no roadmap, no clear sense of what his role should be. He struggled quietly, unsure of how to engage. Into that uncertainty stepped his mother, who took charge of finding help. It was through her initiative that they found Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre, a turning point not just for his daughter, but for him as well.



Anthony bonding with his daughter

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He was unprepared, and he knew it. There was no roadmap, no clear sense of what his role should be. He struggled quietly, unsure of how to engage. Into that uncertainty stepped his mother, who took charge of finding help. It was through her initiative that they found Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre, a turning point not just for his daughter, but for him as well.

At first, Ngumo simply observed the sessions. But what he saw was different from what he expected. His daughter was comfortable there. She responded and engaged. The therapists worked with intention, using structured techniques that slowly drew her out of silence. What began as observation became involvement. He started attending regularly, then took over the routine himself.

Today, he takes his daughter to the centre several times a week. He sits in on sessions, watching closely how therapists guide her, how they use play, repetition and structure to build communication and behaviour. Then he carries those lessons home, replicating them as closely as possible. **Contd Page 3**

EDITORIAL

Letter from the Managing Editor

Dear readers,

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter. In the months since our first issue, Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre has continued to grow in ways that both humble and inspire us, and this edition is our attempt to capture some of that story.

One of our highlights is a message from Archbishop Anthony Muheria, whose pastoral reflection at the close of Autism Acceptance Month reminds us that inclusion is not a programme but a calling. His words set the tone for everything that follows; that these children, and the families who love them, belong fully within our communities and our faith.



**Stephen Ndegwa, Board Member,
Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre**

This edition also marks a milestone. Two years ago, on a morning nobody quite expected, more than 2,000 people gathered and 549 families came forward seeking support. That day, which board member Mrs Miriam Mwangi reflects on so movingly, was not simply the beginning of a centre. It was the moment an invisible community became visible.

One year on from our official opening, the numbers tell part of the story – 157 registered children, 91 attending every week, sessions that grew from 101 in June 2025 to 525 by September. But the deeper story belongs to families like Anthony Muya's, whose daughter's first clear word, "Daddy", arrived after several months of patient, consistent work at this centre.

You will also meet the people who make that work possible. Fr Stephen Ndung'u Gitonga, whose quiet determination gave the centre its foundation. Occupational therapist Esther Wanjiru, who greets children each morning inside one of the country's largest sensory therapy rooms. Sr Stellamaris Wambui, who brings to our board the hard-won wisdom of years in compassionate care. Theirs are not extraordinary stories in the sense of being distant or exceptional. They are the stories of faithful, daily presence.

Alongside them, this edition explores the advocacy landscape – why early diagnosis matters, what genuine inclusion demands, and why policy must catch up with the realities families face. We also hear from our corporate and community partners, without whom accessibility would remain a promise rather than a practice.

And for parents reading this in the quiet hours after a long day, our resource corner is written for you. You are doing important work. You are not alone. As always, Tumaini means hope. May this edition carry some of that forward.

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THE DAY SHE SAID “DADDY” CONTD



The centre has become the foundation of her progress. Through occupational therapy, she has developed routines that give her stability and independence. She understands sequences, follows patterns and engages with her environment in ways she once resisted. Through speech and language therapy, her ability to communicate has begun to open up. Words, though still few, are emerging with intention. Indeed, the changes are gradual, but undeniable.

She now understands instructions and responds in her own way. She engages more with others, including other children at the centre, something she once avoided entirely. Each small milestone builds on the last, forming a progression that is steady, if not predictable. At home, Muya reinforces what the centre begins. He has learned to work without rigid expectations, focusing instead on consistency. Progress, he has realised, is not measured in leaps, but in daily gains.

Some things remain distinctly hers. She insists on using her own potty, carrying it wherever she goes and refusing alternatives. It is a small but defining detail, one that reflects how firmly she holds onto her routines, many of which have been shaped and strengthened through therapy.

Fatherhood, in this context, has required Muya to adapt. He no longer sees himself only as a provider or authority figure. He has become a participant in his daughter's world; teacher, playmate, observer and constant companion.

The work done at the centre has shown him how to meet her where she is, and he has carried that approach into every part of their life. This shift did not come easily. In the early days, public outings were marked by anxiety, meltdowns, stares and a constant urge to apologise. Over time, that changed. As he became more confident, so did those around him. The environment adjusted, and his daughter followed.

He has learned not to over-explain autism. Instead, he allows people to see. Those who spend time around them begin to understand her patterns and his responses, often shaped by what he has learned through therapy. Adjustment happens naturally.

At the centre of it all is a simple discipline; to know his daughter. He studies her moods, her signals, her needs, until communication becomes intuitive. What might be difficult for others has, between them, become manageable. Their connection is built less on words and more on attention, reinforced by the structure and guidance he continues to receive from the centre.

The journey has changed him. His understanding of love, responsibility and presence has deepened. He speaks less about outcomes and more about consistency by showing up, again and again, and trusting the process.

He does not claim to fully understand how his daughter sees him. Whether as a father in the traditional sense or simply as a constant presence is something he cannot define. But it no longer matters.

What matters is that he is there, and that she is growing. He recognises that earlier intervention might have made the journey easier. What matters is that the intervention came, and it continues at the Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre.

ONE YEAR OF MIRACLES

SUPPORTING FAMILIES LIVING WITH AUTISM



St Thorlak Autism Centre patron Archbishop Anthony Muheria cuts the ribbon during the official opening of the centre. He is accompanied by members of the Board of Trustees.

There is a moment that stays with nearly everyone who visits Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre for the first time. Somewhere within the building, a child is laughing - perhaps a child who, only months earlier, could not make eye contact. A child whose parents had travelled for hours from Karatina, Doldol, and beyond, simply because there was nowhere closer to turn.

Not long ago, families in Nanyuki caring for children with autism faced a quiet but profound crisis. Specialised therapy existed, but it was distant and often unaffordable. Archbishop Anthony Muheria of the Archdiocese of Nyeri recognised this gap and chose to act. As he told the founding team, "parents' hopes have been raised. We must not disappoint them." That conviction set in motion a collaboration between medical professionals, clergy, and community advocates to build a centre grounded in dignity, accessibility and hope.

On 2 June 2025, that commitment took shape in public. The centre opened its doors offering therapy free of charge on launch day. Parents moved through occupational therapy rooms, a sensory integration suite, a speech therapy room, a hydrotherapy space, and a mural-lined play area. They came from across the region and left not just relieved, but transformed – carrying the message that help was finally within reach, at a cost of KES 300 per session.

What followed was growth that surpassed even the most optimistic projections. Centre Manager Samuel Karoko, who has overseen operations from the very first day, has watched the transformation unfold in real time. "The parents are happy about the interventions," he reported in the early months. "They are seeing drastic changes in their children." The data bears this out. From 101 client visits in June 2025, the centre grew to 525 sessions in September alone.

By April 2026, 157 children were registered, with 91 attending actively every week and daily enquiries running at between five and ten new families. Parents consistently report improvements in their children's communication, behaviour, independence, and home routines. Satisfaction with the therapists remains uniformly high.

The centre began with occupational therapy, sensory integration, and speech therapy as its core offerings. By April 2026, physiotherapy had been added to the team, reflecting the growing complexity of cases being referred and the board's ambition to establish a fully multidisciplinary therapy hub. Kenya Medical Training College students on clinical attachment have brought fresh energy to the rooms, and a volunteer who is herself on the autism spectrum has joined the team – perhaps the most eloquent symbol of what the centre stands for.

ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE

Archbishop Anthony Muheria highlights need for autism support



Archbishop Muheria during the launch of the centre

Reflecting on children with neuro divergent conditions, particularly autism, Archbishop Muheria observed that they were often misunderstood due to behaviours not easily explained. Difficulties with communication, learning and concentration, he noted, frequently led to misjudgment and placed significant emotional strain on parents and caregivers.

He highlighted ongoing efforts within the Archdiocese, particularly the work of the Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre in Nanyuki, which had provided therapy and care to more than one hundred children within its first year of operation. He expressed gratitude to all who had contributed to the establishment and continued support of the facility.

The Archbishop also commended parents, caregivers and healthcare professionals, describing them as “true heroes” whose dedication, sacrifice and love often went unrecognised. He offered prayers for their continued strength for devoting themselves tirelessly to the care of these children. He further urged Christian communities to foster greater understanding and inclusion, calling on the faithful to move beyond judgment and to recognise the importance of early and sustained therapeutic support for children with developmental challenges.

At the close of Autism Acceptance Month, Archbishop Anthony Muheria of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri called on the faithful in Kenya to deepen their commitment to the dignity, inclusion, and care of children living with autism and other developmental conditions.

In his message issued at the end of April, Archbishop Muheria urged a shift in both language and perception, cautioning against referring to such children as “disabled.” He emphasised that they were not defined by limitations, but were individuals facing unique challenges arising from developmental differences, physical conditions, or illness, challenges that could be addressed and even overcome with appropriate support.



Archbishop Muheria and visitors during the launch.

Additionally, Archbishop Muheria encouraged practical steps toward accessibility within churches and society, including the provision of sign language interpretation, the creation of supportive environments for the visually impaired, and the development of infrastructure such as ramps and accessible facilities.

He reminded the faithful that children with developmental challenges, together with their families, were integral members of the Christian community. He called for continued solidarity and urged all people of goodwill to ensure that these children were welcomed, supported, and fully embraced within society.

CELEBRATING THE 1ST ANNIVERSARY OF TUMAINI ST THORLAK AUTISM CENTRE



Mrs Miriam Mwangi
Board member

Two years ago, on March 2, 2024, a quiet but deeply meaningful moment occurred, one that would change many lives and influence the future of autism care in our community. On that day, families, caregivers and children arrived in much greater numbers than anyone expected. By the end of the registration, 549 individuals seeking various forms of intervention had come forward. Among them, 280 were identified as being on the autism spectrum.

For many families, this was the first time their children's needs were acknowledged within a structured and compassionate environment. What emerged that day was not only a moment of discovery but also a powerful realisation for the Archdiocese and everyone present. The need was much greater than anticipated, and the call to act was both urgent and meaningful.

The impact of that day was enabled by a shared commitment. Families sought support and understanding. Caregivers showed courage and perseverance. The pastoral leadership of the Archbishop, along with the dedication of priests and the Archdiocese, provided guidance and encouragement. Professionals and specialists offered their expertise, while generous benefactors stepped forward in faith to support the vision.

Together, they planted a seed. The overwhelming response renewed our resolve. What started as a simple outreach quickly grew into a mission. The former Tumaini Children's Home was carefully renovated;

spaces were redesigned to support therapy and learning, facilities were equipped, and a vision for a specialised autism center gradually took shape.

This journey reached an important milestone on June 2, 2025, when Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre was officially opened. What began as a moment of discovery had now become a lasting institution dedicated to care, dignity and inclusion.

Today, the centre stands as a living testament to that remarkable beginning. With a client base now exceeding 120 individuals and about 80 children and young people regularly benefiting from weekly therapy sessions, the centre continues to grow as a place of healing, learning and hope. Every therapy session, every step of progress, and every smile of a child discovering new possibilities remind us that the seeds planted two years ago have taken root.

As we celebrate this anniversary, we thank the families who trusted in this mission, the professionals who continue to offer their skill and compassion, the Church leaders who provided vision and pastoral care, and the benefactors whose generosity made this dream a reality. Above all, we celebrate the children and young people themselves. They remain the heart of this mission and the very reason the centre exists. Two years ago, we saw a need. Today, we witness transformation. And the journey of Tumaini – hope – continues.



"We shopped until we had to walk barefoot. May God always bless our Archbishop and our benefactors." Anniversary memories by Miriam

"WE, NOT I": THE PRIEST GIVING KENYA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN A HOME

For families raising children with autism in Kenya, the hardest part is the silence that follows the diagnosis.

Ms Jane Muthoni remembers the moment she realised she was completely alone. Her daughter Amina was five, spinning in tight circles in their sitting room in Meru County, humming a single note that had not changed in three hours. Neighbours had stopped visiting. Her mother-in-law suggested that she consults a herbalist.

The parish priest laid hands on Amina during Mass, a gesture that made Jane feel, for the first time, that her daughter was something to be fixed rather than someone to be loved. "I used to sit on the floor next to her and just cry," Muthoni says. "Not because of Amina. I cried because the whole world had decided she did not belong in it." Unfortunately, she had never heard the word "autism" until Amina was seven years old.

Fr Stephen Ndung'u Gitonga, Director of Caritas for the Archdiocese of Nyeri, did not set out to build an autism centre. He set out to pay attention. "Our priests were coming back from their parishes with the same story," he says. "Different families, different children, same confusion, same isolation, same silence. Something was there. We just did not have a name for it yet."

When COVID-19 arrived, it cracked things open further. Through Hope for You, a major humanitarian relief programme organised by the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri, Caritas distributed food and support to the most vulnerable.

The Archbishop established the Good Shepherd Call Centre, a coordinated mental health response for communities in freefall. What counsellors found, repeatedly, was autism, which at the time was spoken of quietly, was persistently unaddressed and surrounded by stigma.

"In the absence of understanding," Fr Gitonga says, "people reach for what they know. But sometimes what they know does terrible damage." The response was methodical. Specialists were consulted. Benchmarking visits were made to the Kenya Institute of Special Education. But the most important step, Fr Gitonga insists, was sitting down with the parents themselves.

"We did not bring them in as recipients of care. We brought them in as partners. These parents had spent years searching for answers. Their experience was invaluable data."

A vacant church facility in Nanyuki was identified, repurposed and staffed. When the doors opened for a first public engagement, nobody was prepared for what came. "We expected a good turnout,"

Fr Gitonga says, with a laugh, "but we did not expect what came."

Over 2,000 people gathered, families from across Kenya, grandmothers who had travelled overnight on buses, professionals and advocates. David Kariuki, a father of twins with autism who drove from Nakuru, describes sitting in that crowd and feeling, for the first time, that he did not have to explain himself.

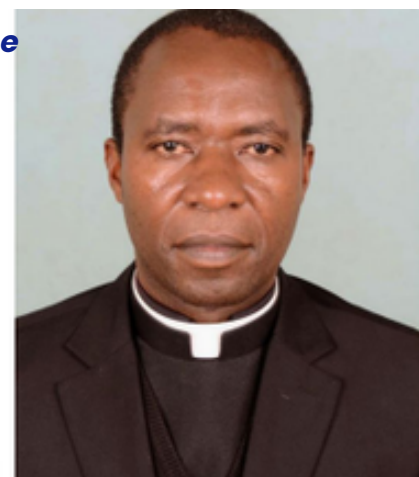
"I did not have to defend my children," he says. "I just sat there and thought, we are not alone."

The Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre had already done something significant before a single therapy session was conducted. It had made hundreds of families visible.

The day-to-day reality is harder. Demand exceeds capacity. Speech therapists are hard to come by. Families travel long distances. Some cannot afford even the minimal fees the centre charges. "We are not where we want to be," Fr Gitonga says plainly.

"But we know where we are, and we are honest about the distance between the two."

Sponsors subsidise children whose families cannot pay. Partners step in. The gaps are named openly and addressed incrementally. "We are not a perfect institution," he says. "We are a faithful one."



**Rev Fr Stephen Ndungu,
Director Caritas Nyeri
Archdiocese and member of
the Board of Trustees**

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Some of the hardest conversations, he says, are about belief. Of families arriving having been told their child is cursed, that sin is the explanation, that prayer is the only answer. "We do not walk in and tell people they are wrong," he says. "We create space. Faith and clinical insight are not enemies. They can speak to each other."

The Archbishop's network of priests now carries a clear message into every parish - these children belong. Their families are not cursed. Help exists. "The church has a battalion," Fr Stephen says quietly. "We decided to use it."

Amina is ten now. She attends the centre twice a week and has begun, haltingly, to use words. Last month, unprompted, she took her mother's hand. "After all those years of feeling invisible," Muthoni says, "somebody built us a door. And we walked through it."

Fr Stephen would resist the credit. "We, not I," he says. "Always. The moment you make this about one person, you have already begun to fail."

WHERE RECOVERY MEETS CARE: SISTER WAMBUI ON BUILDING COMPASSIONATE INSTITUTIONS



Sister Stellamaris Wambui interacting with children at the St Thorlak Autism Centre during a fun day

As the founder and chairperson of Star of the See Mental Health Initiative based in Othaya, Nyeri County, Sr Wambui works at the frontlines of addiction recovery, walking alongside men battling alcohol and substance abuse. She also serves as a board member of the Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre, helping shape an institution dedicated to children on the autism spectrum and the families who support them.

Addiction rehabilitation and autism care may appear unrelated, yet Sr Wambui sees a powerful connection between the two. Both demand patience, dignity, and institutions built on compassion rather than quick fixes. At Star of the Sea Mental Health Initiative, recovery is rarely straightforward. Some patients arrive seeking help; others are brought in by families or authorities when addiction becomes a community concern. Progress varies widely, and resistance is common.

Sr Wambui describes her most difficult days as those when someone refuses help even when it is within reach. Yet these moments have deepened her understanding of care, not as control, but as accompaniment.

This insight carries into her work at Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre. Autism, like addiction, does not follow linear timelines. Development unfolds gradually, often in small, easily overlooked steps. Expecting dramatic change, she believes, only sets families and institutions up for frustration. One of the clearest parallels Sr Wambui, who is based at the Archdiocese of Nyeri, observes across both spaces is the experience of families. At the Star of the See Mental Health Initiative, she meets parents who have exhausted their savings, their energy, and their hope. Many carry guilt, shame, and a profound sense of isolation.

She recognises the same emotional weight among families raising children with autism. "In both cases," she notes, "families are not only seeking services, they are seeking understanding as well."

This perspective shapes her advocacy at Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre, where she consistently emphasises caregiver support, education and reassurance. Effective autism care, she insists, must walk with families, not simply work on the child. A central pillar of Sr Wambui's work is her conviction that addiction is a disease, not a moral failure. Moral judgement, she warns, delays treatment and deepens stigma. The same principle guides her approach to autism.

For Sr Stellamaris Wambui, care is not an abstract idea. It is lived daily, in places where pain is real and progress is slow.

Misunderstanding, whether of addiction or disability, creates fear and exclusion. As a board member, she has been a consistent voice for clarity, helping communities distinguish between autism, mental illness, and psychiatric conditions, and guiding families toward appropriate care pathways.

Rehabilitation work has taught Sr Wambui that progress is often quiet. A completed therapy cycle, a return of self-worth, or a resisted relapse can be as meaningful as any visible transformation. She believes autism care requires the same mindset.

From her dual roles, Sr Wambui is candid about the realities of running care institutions. Skilled staff, specialised programmes, and family support systems come at a cost that is routinely underestimated. She challenges supporters to view contributions not as charity, but as investment in human potential. “When care is neglected,” she cautions, “society pays later.”

Faith quietly underpins her work. In rehabilitation, spiritual support complements clinical therapy. In autism care, faith affirms the dignity and worth of every child. For her, faith does not replace professionalism; it deepens it. “It reminds us why we serve,” she reflects, “and who we are serving.”

Across both spaces, Sr Wambui embodies a simple but demanding truth - good intentions alone are not enough. Whether supporting recovery from addiction or nurturing a child on the autism spectrum, she believes institutions must be built to last, places where people are not defined by their struggles, but supported through them. That, she says, is how hope becomes practical, and compassionate institutions are formed

APRIL WORLD AUTISM MONTH: AWARENESS, ACCEPTANCE AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



A therapy session at the St Thoralak Autism Centre.

Every April, a quiet but powerful conversation returns to public life in classrooms, clinics, homes and workplaces. World Autism Acceptance Month is not about spectacle but reflection, learning and commitment to understanding autism as a vital form of human diversity.

For decades, autism remained on the margins, misunderstood and hidden under stigma. Families navigated alone. That began to change in the early 21st century. In 2007, the UN recognised April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day, elevating autism from a private struggle to a global human rights concern.

April soon expanded into a full month of engagement, shifting the conversation from

“What is autism?” to “How do we support autistic individuals?”

At its core, World Autism Acceptance Month bridges understanding. Autism is a spectrum; some communicate verbally, others non-verbally; some need daily support, others live independently. April challenges the myth of a single autistic experience, replacing it with a narrative that recognises both strengths and needs.

Beyond awareness, acceptance demands action. It asks schools to adapt, workplaces to rethink inclusion, and communities to welcome, not merely accommodate, autistic individuals. Earlier identification now allows timely support. Professional training has improved. Parents are better informed and less isolated. Public discourse increasingly recognises neurodiversity as a natural human variation.

Yet World Autism Acceptance Month also reflects unfinished work. Access to services remains uneven, especially in low-resource settings. Adult autism is under-supported. Stigma persists, while many families face financial strain and systemic barriers. April does not gloss over these realities.

For therapy centres, April reaffirms evidence-based, ethical care, not changing who a person is, but unlocking communication, independence and quality of life. Increasingly, autistic adults lead their own conversations, reminding us that the goal is empowerment, not compliance.

World Autism Acceptance Month invites us to pause and recommit. Awareness must lead to acceptance, acceptance to access, and access to opportunity. Inclusion is the measure of a compassionate society. It calls on all of us to listen, act thoughtfully, and walk alongside autistic individuals and their families with understanding, respect and hope.



Board member Mrs Lydia Chege (left) welcomes Centre patron Archbishop Anthony Muheria and an autism advocate during the launch event.

HOW ESTHER WANJIRU HELPS CHILDREN FIND INDEPENDENCE AND BRIGHTER FUTURES'



Esther supervises group play at Centre.

At exactly 8 a.m., Esther Wanjiru Nderu begins her day welcoming children into a space designed not just for therapy, but for transformation. Inside one of the country's largest sensory therapy rooms, laughter, movement and quiet breakthroughs unfold daily. For Esther, an occupational therapist driven by purpose, each session is a step toward independence for children who experience the world differently.

Her journey began in 2015 at the Kenya Medical Training College where she studied occupational therapy. During her clinical placement, she developed a keen interest in autism and later specialised in paediatric therapy, driven by "a strong interest in helping children with special needs achieve their delayed milestones."

Later in her clinical placement, Wanjiru got a keen interest in understanding autism and later specialising with paediatric therapy. Her early experience at Cottage Hospital in Nanyuki two years working with children facing developmental challenges prepared her for her current role at the Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre. Her entry came through an unexpected connection - a former client whose child she had treated.

"One of the board members informed me about the centre," Esther recalls. "I was interested because it aligns with my passion, helping those who are not financially able to access therapy."

That mission remains central. Sessions cost just Sh 300, a fee that has improved consistency in care. "Parents are now able to bring their children more regularly. With that consistency, we see so much progress."

A typical day involves assessing children, running therapy sessions, developing treatment plans and guiding parents. She works in structured one-hour sessions, combining clinical precision with creativity. From sensory integration exercises such as swinging, spinning and deep pressure massage to table activities like puzzles and fine motor tasks, every intervention is carefully designed.

Inside the sensory room, controlled input helps children "become more calm, focused and regulated." Ball pit play, monkey bar climbing and weighted therapies are tools for improving coordination, emotional regulation and cognitive development.

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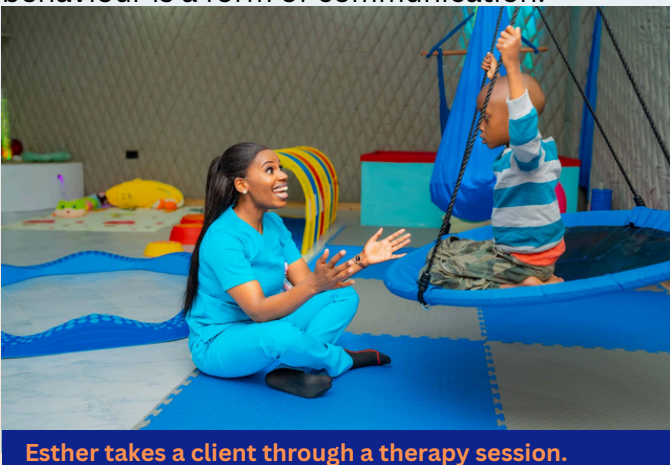
Yet challenges remain. Parental denial is a difficult barrier. "Some parents are in denial even after assessment. When that happens, therapy is not taken seriously, and progress is affected." Inconsistent attendance and late intervention also pose hurdles. Beyond clinical issues, Wanjiru laments that stigma persists through misconceptions that autism is caused by curses or that children are simply undisciplined

Autism is not a limitation," Wanjiru emphasises. "It is just a different way of experiencing the world." Through education, she works to shift these perceptions, helping families understand that behaviours are often forms of communication.

Her approach is deeply individualised. "Each child has their own strengths and challenges. We create treatment plans based on both." For some, that means building on cognitive strengths through puzzles. For others, it involves physical activities like football to develop social and motor skills.

The impact is best seen in the stories she shares. One child, once unable to tolerate touch, avoided basic activities like bathing and eating. After targeted therapy, the child began to engage comfortably. Another, who struggled with writing due to delayed motor development, now writes independently.

"These changes are why we do what we do," Esther says quietly. For families navigating an autism diagnosis, the journey can be overwhelming. She sees her role as both therapist and guide. "I educate parents and help them understand their child. Every behaviour is a form of communication."



Esther takes a client through a therapy session.



Father Stephen Munyogo (right) of the Archdiocese of Nyeri and Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre manager Samuel Karoko talks to one of the centre's clients and her grandmother.

Looking ahead, her vision is ambitious but grounded. She hopes to see more trained professionals, better-equipped facilities and increased awareness across Kenya.

Outreach programmes, she believes, will be key to reaching underserved communities. She is also candid about systemic gaps. "Our curriculum is quite behind in autism," calling for more specialised training. Despite this, she remains hopeful.

Through it all, the children remain her greatest teachers. "I have learned patience, resilience and to celebrate every achievement, no matter how small." In a world that often misunderstands neurodiversity, Wanjiru is helping to rewrite the narrative, one child, one family, and one breakthrough at a time

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: POWERING HOPE, EXPANDING POSSIBILITY



Archbishop Anthony Muheria presents the logbook of the courtesy car to Centre manager Samuel Karoko. Looking on is the NCBA managing director John Gachora.

Beyond funding, our partners help shift narratives. In a society where autism is often misunderstood or stigmatised, they stand with us in championing awareness, inclusion and acceptance. Their voices amplify our mission, ensuring that children are not defined by limitations, but recognized for their potential.

A powerful example of this collaboration is the support from institutions and well-wishers whose contributions, from infrastructure to mobility, have directly improved access for families across Nanyuki and surrounding regions. At Tumaini, partnership is transformational. It is the difference between isolation and community, between exclusion and belonging.

As we continue to grow, we invite more organisations to walk this journey with us. Because when compassion meets commitment, we build hope, restore dignity, and create a future where every autistic child is seen, supported and celebrated.

At the heart of Tumaini St. Thorlak Autism Centre lies a simple truth; lasting impact is never built alone. It is shaped through partnerships that move beyond charity into shared purpose, where institutions, businesses and individuals become co-creators of dignity, access and opportunity.

Born from the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri's response to the silent struggles of families raising autistic children, the one-year old centre was designed as more than a therapy centre. It is a community movement grounded in compassion and action, providing affordable occupational and speech therapy, counselling, and life-skills support to children who would otherwise go without care.

Public Profile

Yet the centre's ability to deliver on this promise depends significantly on the strength of its partnerships. Our corporate and development partners play a transformative role in expanding access and deepening impact. Through their support, therapy costs remain accessible, facilities continue to grow, and innovations, such as sensory spaces and outreach programmes, become possible.

Partnerships also strengthen our long-term vision of training local professionals, reducing dependence on distant specialists, and building a sustainable ecosystem of care within the community.



Archbishop Muheria blesses the courtesy car.

WHY EARLY DIAGNOSIS, INCLUSION, AND POLICY MATTER FOR AUTISTIC COMMUNITIES



Rosemary Wachira a former occupational therapist at the Centre

At Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre, we believe true progress comes through advocacy, awareness and action. In this edition, we focus on four areas that shape the lives of autistic individuals and their families.

When autism is identified early, intervention can begin immediately. Research is clear that children who receive early support develop stronger communication skills, manage sensory needs more effectively, and build genuine confidence during crucial developmental stages. Yet many children go undiagnosed until much later, particularly in underserved communities.

These children miss critical intervention windows, not because of family failings, but because assessment simply is not accessible. We encourage parents and caregivers to trust their instincts. If a child's development seems different, seek professional evaluation. Early action is about giving children the right tools at the right moment.

Beyond the myths

Misconceptions about autism cause real harm. Autism is not caused by parenting or vaccines. It has genetic and biological roots. When we repeat these myths, we add unnecessary guilt to families already doing their best.

Another damaging myth is that autistic people lack emotion or empathy. Many autistic individuals experience emotions intensely. They may not show emotion in expected ways, but their emotional depth is real and profound. They care about others and the world around them.

Then there is the idea that all autistic people are the same. Autism is a spectrum. Every autistic person is unique, with their own strengths, challenges and personalities.

Some are highly verbal while others communicate differently. Some need significant support while others live independently. This variation is how neurodiversity works.

Perhaps the most limiting myth is that autistic people cannot work or live independently. With appropriate support and accommodations, many autistic adults thrive in employment and independent living. When they struggle, it is often because systems lack flexibility, not because autistic people lack ability.

Genuine inclusion works

Inclusion in schools and workplaces is recognising that diversity strengthens communities. In schools, autistic students learn alongside peers while receiving necessary support. They develop friendships, see themselves as part of the community, and their classmates learn that difference is normal.

But real inclusion requires trained teachers, accessible communication, sensory-friendly spaces and genuine flexibility. In workplaces, autistic employees bring exceptional attention to detail, strong focus, and creative problem-solving. Forward-thinking companies discover that hiring autistic talent strengthens teams, but only when systems are designed to help them succeed.

Sustainable change requires policy support. We need mandatory autism screening in early childhood programmes, education funding that truly supports inclusion, employment protections and incentives, accessible healthcare for diagnosis and support, and anti-discrimination laws with teeth. These are basic demands that recognise autistic people deserve equal opportunities.

Advocacy starts with awareness. Share what you learn. Correct misconceptions. Support policies that centre autistic voices. At Tumaini St Thorlak, we are committed to this work every day. We believe in a future where autistic people are not just accepted but celebrated for who they are as well.

PARENT RESOURCE CORNER FOR EVERYDAY SUPPORT



A therapy session at the Centre

Parenting an autistic child brings moments of deep joy alongside real, daily challenges. You may be navigating sensory sensitivities, communication differences, behavioural patterns, and the quiet question of whether you are doing enough. At Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre, we understand that what parents need most is practical guidance they can use in real life. Our Parent Resource Corner is designed to offer tools that are simple, effective and adaptable to your family's unique rhythm.

Therapy is not limited to formal sessions. Some of the most meaningful growth happens at home, in familiar spaces where your child feels secure. Consistency and patience matter more than perfection. Building predictable routines can ease anxiety and create a sense of safety. Visual schedules, timers and clear transitions between activities can help your child understand what comes next. A simple bedtime routine or a short morning checklist can set the tone for the entire day.

Your child's interests are powerful pathways to learning. Whether they love trains, music, animals or patterns, these passions can be used to support communication, social interaction and learning. When you build on what your child already enjoys, engagement becomes natural rather than forced.

Sensory regulation plays a crucial role in daily wellbeing. Many autistic children need regular breaks to reset their nervous system. This might include a quiet corner, movement activities like jumping or swinging, or calming tools such as fidget items. Recognising when your child needs a break and offering it early can prevent distress and build self-awareness over time.

So Behaviour is a form of communication. When your child struggles, there is always a reason behind it. Instead of reacting immediately, try to understand what is driving the behaviour. It could be sensory overload, fatigue, hunger or anxiety. Identifying triggers allows you to respond with empathy and prevent future challenges.

Encouraging positive behaviour works best when it is intentional. Acknowledge and praise small successes. This builds confidence and reinforces the behaviours you want to see. Offering limited choices can also reduce conflict. Simple options like choosing between two outfits give your child a sense of control while keeping routines on track.

Nutrition can influence mood, focus and energy levels. Many autistic children have strong food preferences linked to texture, smell or appearance. Begin with foods your child already accepts and introduce new options gradually without pressure. Observing how certain foods affect your child can also be helpful. Keeping a simple record may reveal patterns that guide better choices.

Screen time is part of modern parenting and can be both helpful and challenging. For many autistic children, screens provide comfort and engagement. The goal is balance. Setting clear and consistent limits helps create structure, while allowing flexibility on more difficult days. Choosing meaningful content and occasionally joining your child during screen time can turn it into a shared experience.

Parenting in this journey requires resilience and constant learning. Progress does not happen all at once, and that is okay. What matters is your presence, effort, and willingness to keep going. You are already doing important work every single day. Tumaini St Thorlak Autism Centre stands with you. Whether you need guidance, reassurance or practical tools, you are not alone on this path.

SEEING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN NEURODIVERSITY

In every age, societies reveal their deepest values by how they treat difference. Neurodiversity, particularly autism, invites us into one of the most important moral and spiritual conversations of our time - the inherent question of human dignity.

From a spiritual perspective, dignity does not come from productivity, eloquence, academic performance or social conformity. It precedes all of that. Long before a child speaks or struggles, achieves or fails, they are. And in that being, dignity is already complete.

Many faith traditions, especially Christianity, root human dignity in divine intention rather than human ability. Scripture tells us that every person is created intentionally and lovingly. The Bible affirms this truth repeatedly, reminding us that human worth is not assigned by society but bestowed by God. Therefore, neurodiversity is not a deviation from God's design but is part of the breadth of that design.

Autism challenges the world's narrow definitions of "normal." It disrupts our preference for speed, verbal fluency, eye contact and predictable behaviour. Spiritually, this disruption is an invitation to humility. Neurodiverse individuals remind us that humanity, just like the image of God, is richly varied.



Saint Thorlak, who is widely recognised in Catholic and neurodivergent communities as the spiritual patron saint of autistic people.

Dignity is not diminished by support needs. A person who requires assistance with communication or daily living is no less valuable than one who does not.

In fact, many spiritual traditions teach that vulnerability is a sacred space, one that calls others into compassion, patience and love. Many autistic individuals experience the world with unusual depth, honesty, focus and sensitivity. Their ways of relating, though different, can be profoundly authentic.

They challenge superficiality and force us to slow down, listen more carefully and love more deliberately. In doing so, they become teachers, not merely recipients of care.

For families and caregivers, the journey with autism is often marked by exhaustion, uncertainty and moments of silent grief. A spiritual lens offers meaning without denying difficulty. It affirms that caregiving itself is an expression of steadfast love that mirrors the deepest spiritual virtues of patience, faithfulness and hope.

For communities of faith and care, neurodiversity presents a moral test. Are our spaces truly welcoming, or only welcoming to those who fit expected norms? Do we value people for who they are, or for how closely they resemble our comfort zones? Inclusion is not proven by good intentions alone, but by practical hospitality – adapted spaces, flexible expectations, and hearts willing to be stretched.

A spiritual understanding of dignity also reframes therapy. Therapy is not about erasing difference or forcing conformity. It is about supporting communication, reducing distress, building independence where possible and honouring the personhood of the individual at every stage. When grounded in dignity, therapy becomes an act of service, not control; partnership, not correction.

Ultimately, neurodiversity calls us back to a foundational spiritual truth where every human life carries sacred value, regardless of ability. Autism reveals how fragile and conditional our worldly definitions of worth can be, and how urgently they need correction.

As we reflect spiritually on dignity and neurodiversity, we are invited to look beyond diagnosis. To encounter the person. And to remember that a society, and a faith, is only as strong as its willingness to honour the dignity of all its members, especially those who ask us to love in deeper, more demanding ways.

Operating Hours
Monday – Saturday: 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Sunday & Public Holidays: Closed



TUMAINI

St. Thorlak Autism Centre
*Meeting Neurodiversity with
Love*



A birthday party with enlightening sessions 🎂



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