

# Nia Foundation/Joy Center for Autism



## Nia Foundation Six Month Report 2025

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## Introduction

Founded on the unwavering commitment of the late Zemi Yenus, the Nia Foundation has been a beacon of hope in Ethiopia since May 2002. For over two decades, as a legally recognized Ethiopian Local Civil Society Organization (re-registered under Proclamation No. 1113/2019 with registration no. 0854), we've championed the holistic well-being of less privileged children, women, and youth. Our pioneering initiative, the Joy Center for Autism, has been providing vital support and services to individuals with Autism and Related Developmental Disorders and their families for 23 years, fostering a more inclusive society where all can thrive.

This six-month report for the 2025 fiscal year highlights our continued dedication to inspiring, empowering, and improving the lives of those we serve. A significant achievement has been recorded, our center-based holistic autism rehabilitation program, shown significant progress in Holistic rehabilitation services for 100 children and you with Autism and their families. Consequently, significant progress also made on one of our key projects “Joy Center of Excellence for Autism construction. Our effects also extended in empowering women economically and psychosocially, promoting equal rights and opportunities. This report will further detail our key performances, achievements, and the challenges we faced in the last six month, along with our strategic way forward.

## Partnerships

In 2025 first six-month Nia as usual actively engaged with the existing partners and stakeholders, different international and local civil society organizations and government agencies which sought immense support in the overall performance and operation of our organization. Materials through financial contribution, monitoring and evaluation and developing our capacity building to mention our key partners. New partnership window of opportunities also exhibited and explored with *Abronet Ethiopia, Ali Bira Foundation- Echo Global Professional Support Hub, Eldof Foundation,*

We actively engaged in with the existing partnership initiatives with government agencies

including Ethio-Telecom, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Defense Force, Addis Ababa Finance office, and Subsequent regional offices, we also have strengthened our existing collaborations with networks including the Ethiopian Federation for persons with disability, Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development, Cheshire Ethiopia, UNICEF, GIDABO Policy Center, Members of Autism Society of Ethiopia, Network of Ethiopian Women Associations, CORHA, and Orbit Technology Solutions, others on different partnership initiatives.



*Picture1: National Award Recognition of of Ministry of Health*

**Six Month Activity Performance Summary**

No	Initiatives	Annual targets	Key achievements during 6 month 2025.	Performance %
1	<b>Teachers and Therapist</b>	Continue to support the staff on Holistic rehabilitation service through 44 teachers and therapists	Continued support of 44 teachers and therapists	High 100%

2	<b>Holistic Rehabilitation for Children with Autism (Planned 120 children with Autism received HARP, 100 Children are on therapy and received skill training and therapy Rehabilitation service,</b>			
	<b>2.1. Sensory Skill</b>	We have planned to give sensory skill training for 120 children	100 children with Autism received sensory skill training,	83%
	<b>2.2. Self Help Skill</b>	We have planned to give self-help skill training for 120 children	100 children with Autism received Self-help skill training,	83%
	<b>2.3. Social Skill</b>	We have planned to give social skill training for 120 children	100 children with Autism received social skill training	83%
	<b>2.4. Academic skills</b>	We have planned to give Academic skill for 120 children	100 children with Autism received academic skill training sessions	83%
	<b>2.5. Behavior Modification Therapy</b>	We have planned to give BMT for 120 children	100 children with Autism got Behavioral Modification therapy Sessions	83%
	<b>2.6. Nutritional Support</b>	We have planned to give Nutritional support for 120 children	100 children received Nutritional support	83%
3	<b>Family Empowerment (120 parents supported through psychosocial and 40 low-income mothers enrolled to (IGA).</b>			
	<b>3.1. IGA Financial Support to Mothers</b>	Enroll 40 (10 (UNICEF) 30 (Gidado) low-income mothers to IGA scheme.	5 parents selected, Trained and enrolled with IGA scheme. Assessment has been done for about 280 mothers in Diredawa, Mekele, Butajira, currently under selection process.	50 %
	<b>3.2. Conduct Monthly Parents Meeting refreshments</b>	Conduct 12 monthly family support group meeting and psychosocial support sessions.	We conduct 6 monthly family support group meeting and psychosocial support sessions. Wide range of issues have been discussed and experience sharing was conducted.	100%
4	<b>Service Expansion of CBHS</b>			
	<b>4.1. Joy Center of Excellence for Autism Constructing</b>	Completion of 1 <sup>st</sup> Phase of the project.	Structural works have been completed and finishing operations are under way.	Very high

	<b>Construction Project</b>			
	<b>4.2. Second Branch Expansion</b>	Second Branch Expansion	- Under preparation	High
5	<b>Community and Home-Based Autism Care Program-</b>			
	<b>5.1 Manual Preparation,</b>	Prepared manual	Manual Under preparation	50 %
	<b>5.2. Launching workshop,</b>	Launching workshop conducted,	- Under program Preparation	-
	<b>5.3. Training for on home-based manual for teachers and families</b>	Train 50 teacher and families on home-based autism care manual,	- Not Accomplished	-
6	<b>Continued ASD Awareness Raising and Community Mobilization (WAAD).</b>			
6.1	<b>Annual WAAD Celebration</b>	Organize national WAAD celebration event.	WAAD Celebration was conducted on April 2 <sup>nd</sup> Joy Center, above 300 participants took part on the celebration event.	100 %
6.2	<b>Joint Press Release Conference</b>	Organize Joint Press release conference at National level	Joint Press Release conference was conducted	(100%)
6.3	<b>Conduct Autism Awareness Campaign in 4 selected regional cities,</b>	Conduct autism awareness campaigns in 4 Regions ([Tigray Mekelle, Dire Dawa, South Ethiopia- Wolayta Sodo, and Central Ethiopia- Butajira)	Regional autism awareness campaigns were conducted in 3 regions [Tigray Mekelle, Dire Dawa, and Central Ethiopia- Butajira)	(75 %)
6.4	<b>Continue national initiative of public awareness raising campaign on autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disability</b>	To train total of 30 caregivers and 20 stakeholders in each regional city.	A total of 60 caregivers and 40 stakeholders were trained in the 2 regional cities in Diredawa and Butajira.	100%
6.5	<b>Training of mothers were trained on Basic life skills, Job preparation skills &amp;</b>	10 Mothers trained on Basic life skills, Job preparation skills & Entrepreneurship	Total of 10 mothers were trained on Basic life skills, Job preparation skills & Entrepreneurship training for 5 days equipping them with	100%

	<b>Entrepreneurship training.</b>		the skills to start and manage their own businesses.	
6.6	<b>Up keeping and strengthening the service provision of the joy center for autism</b>	Cover total cost of 20 students for 12 months for Holistic Autism Rehabilitation interventions.	20 students who were facing financial hardship and unable to afford the intervention costs at the center have been granted 12 months full sponsorship. Advance payments were made for purchasing 10 tables and 20 chairs for students at the center	100%
7	<b>Project Procurement of Equipment's for Program Implementation</b>			
7.1	<b>Laptop Computers</b>	4	4	100 %
7.2	<b>Camera</b>	1	1	100 %
7.3	<b>Printer</b>	1	1	100 %
7.4	<b>Copier</b>	1	1	100 %
7.5	<b>Lamination Machine</b>	3	3	100 %
7.6	<b>Bicycle</b>			
7.7	<b>Speech Therapy Support Materia</b>			
7.8	<b>Funny Bags</b>			
7.9	<b>Water play mat</b>			
8	<b>Review Meetings &amp; Experience Sharing</b>			
8.1	<b>Quarterly review meetings with project partners</b>	Conduct 4 quarterly project progress review meeting	Quarterly review meeting was held with UNICEF and GIDABO project	100%
8.2	<b>Quarterly staff review meetings</b>	Conduct 4 review meeting with Nia Foundation staff	2 review meetings were conducted	100%

# Performance Narrative Report

## Institutional Leadership and Management

Organizational Governance and Team Engagement: Effective functioning and strategic direction of the Nia Foundation are underpinned by strong organizational governance and the dedicated engagement of its teams. This reporting period has seen continuous efforts to strengthen these foundational elements.

### **A. Board of Directors (BOD)**

The relationship with the Board of Directors and the active engagement of its members are pivotal in the Foundation's decision-making processes. In this fiscal year, the Board successfully held 2 regular meetings, fulfilling the expected quarterly schedule. As the Foundation continues to navigate increasing challenges, particularly concerning the construction project and overall operations, it is evident that the engagement and support of the Board of Directors must be further strengthened and improved to ensure continued resilience and strategic oversight.

### **B. The Senior Management Team (SMT)**

Nia Foundation has actively pursued several leadership and management initiatives, aimed at enhancing the overall execution of plans and operations within the organization. A focus on institutionalization, fostering teamwork, and strategic priority setting at the senior management level has led to notable improvements in the organizational capacity. The SMT convenes in regular sessions every 15 days, diligently focusing on established priorities and dedicating efforts to closely follow up on the implementation of initiatives outlined in the annual plan. This strong team spirit has significantly contributed to enhancing the execution capacity of projects and improving the overall performance of the organization.

### **C. The Advisory Teams**

Four dedicated Advisory Teams have been established and actively engaged in supporting the management team across various critical areas, including program implementation, the Joy Center of Excellence Construction Project, and the overall operations of the organization. The role of

these advisory teams continued to yield a wide range of positive impacts, contributing significantly to the improvement of Nia's overall performance year.

The Dream Team, serving as advisors on program and organizational operations, played a role in supporting the overall operations and actively engaged in various resource mobilization and financial mobilization mechanisms as well as project designing. The Construction Advisory Team, on the other hand, exerted significant effort in providing support and consultation, and was actively involved in problem-solving related to the construction project implementation. Nia Foundation extends its deep gratitude for their unwavering support and the crucial role they have played. The Clinical Advisory Team, currently under establishment, is poised to have a strong engagement in the improvement of the holistic rehabilitation program. We believe it requires major redesigning and restructuring to further enhance its effectiveness.

#### **D. The Staff**

The relationship with the Nia Foundation staffs has also seen immense improvement during this reporting period. We successfully conducted 2 staff meetings on a quarterly basis. During these sessions, the overall performance of the organization was thoroughly evaluated, along other priority agendas and active participation and engagement of the staff were further solidified, fostering a more cohesive and committed workforce. A truly heartfelt moment this period was the staff-initiated recognition and acknowledgement of *Mrs. Elleni Damtew Asfaw*, the Executive Director of the organization, for Her extraordinary servant leadership, unwavering commitment, and profound sacrifices and the support of her family were honored in what was a deeply moving and unforgettable event for everyone present. `

#### **Holistic Autism Rehabilitation and Care**

Joy Center for Autism has been addressing the (ASD), a complex neurodevelopmental condition impacting social interaction, communication, behavior, and various neurological functions. Recognizing the significant variability in symptom presentation and severity among individuals, the Center's intervention strategies are meticulously individualized to ensure each child receives precisely tailored and effective support. This approach underscores a commitment to holistic

rehabilitation children and youth on spectrum and psychosocial and emotional support to their family.

Over the past six months, we are being able to enrolled 100 from planned 120 children and youth with autism and engaged in a comprehensive array of services designed to foster development across critical domains: self-help skills, social and behavioral support, sensory integration, academic development, and nutritional care. Each intervention is delivered through personalized plans that directly address the unique strengths and challenges presented by every child.

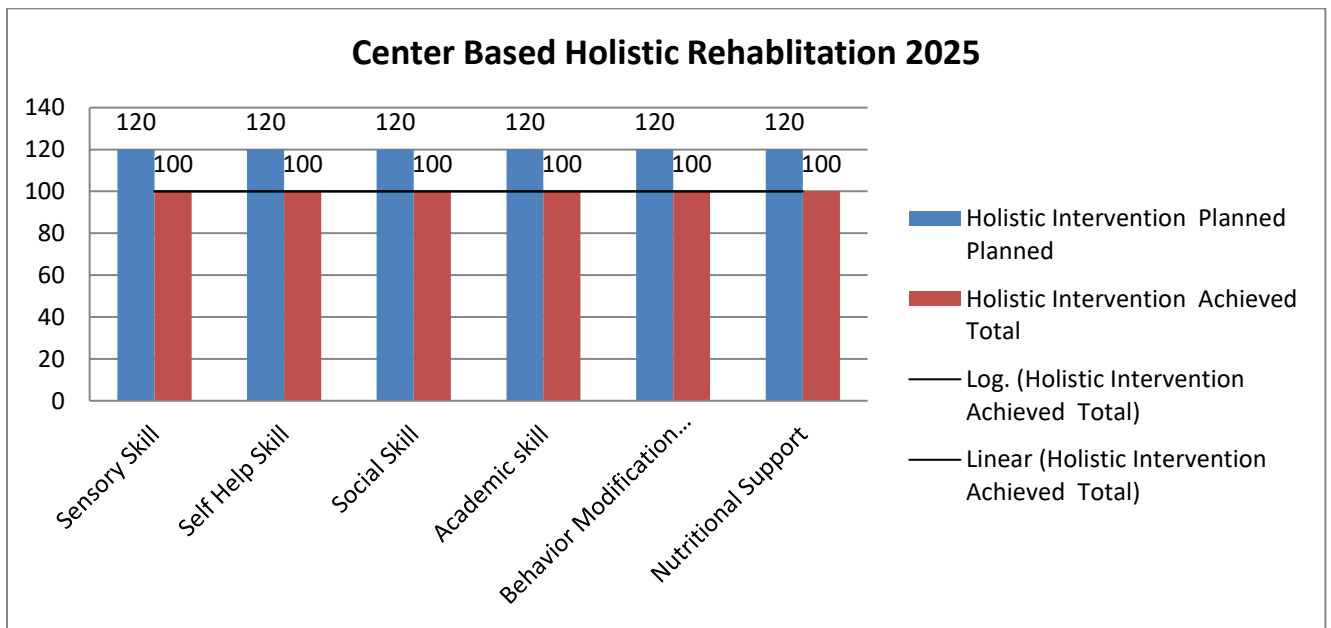
The Self-Help Skills Training Program is instrumental in equipping children and youth with essential life competencies, encompassing toileting, personal hygiene, dressing, and independent management of daily routines. This program cultivates autonomy and self-confidence in managing everyday tasks. Concurrently, the Social and Behavioral Skills Program prioritizes the cultivation of interpersonal aptitudes and emotional regulation. Through structured group activities and targeted social thinking exercises, participants are guided from potential isolation towards active engagement with peers and caregivers.

Sensory Integration Therapy constitutes another vital element of the curriculum, employing customized activities involving tactile, visual, auditory, and physical stimuli. These interventions facilitate more effective processing of sensory input and the development of self-regulation strategies. The Center also utilizes the ABUGIDA FONETIKS curriculum for speech therapy, an innovative and culturally relevant pedagogical method aimed at building foundational skills in language, with lessons adapted to each child's learning pace and style.

Nutritional Support Program its inclusion within the Center's holistic care model reinforces its recognition as an integral component of overall well-being. This comprehensive service delivery is upheld by a dedicated team of therapists, special educators, and caregivers, who maintain and ensure individualized attention and the provision of high-quality care. Furthermore, through Music therapy students are given musical activities such as singing, playing instruments and listening to music. These activities encourage communication and social skills like making eye contact, sharing attention and taking turns. Last but not least, Occupational therapy: With this type of therapy

center works with students with a goal to improve their everyday skills which allows them to become more independent.

For our students with autism, together with parents/caregivers the programs focus on identification of any impediments that prevent them from partaking in any typical day-to-day activities like independent dressing, eating, grooming, using the potty/ bathroom and self-care. After identification each students OT goal is set to track progress. The steadfast mission of the Joy Center for Autism remains to enhance the quality of life for children with autism and to empower each individual to achieve their fullest potential through compassionate, evidence-based, and child-centered rehabilitation services.



*Graph 1: Center Based Rehabilitation and Care Support*

### Overall Achievements: Holistic Rehabilitation Program

The first six months of the 2025 fiscal year have seen remarkable advancements within our holistic rehabilitation program, yielding significant and tangible outcomes for children with developmental disorders and their families.

- We successfully implemented rigorous assessment protocols, utilizing our specially developed tools to accurately identify and understand the diverse needs of children with

developmental disorders or special needs. This foundational step ensures tailored and effective interventions.

- Through dedicated rehabilitation at the Joy Center, children with autism have made substantial progress, enabling them to actively participate in day-to-day engagements within their communities. This signifies a crucial step towards greater integration and independence.
- Children attending the center have notably developed and refined their fine and gross motor skills, demonstrating improved coordination and the ability to effectively utilize their sensory organs. This advancement is fundamental to their overall developmental progress.
- Our programs have fostered significant improvements in the physical, social, and communication skills of the children at the center, equipping them with essential tools for interaction and expression.
- A key achievement has been the development of self-help and self-care skills among the children, empowering them with increased autonomy and independence in managing their daily routines.
- Furthermore, we are pleased to report a consistent improvement and maintenance of the health and nutritional status of the children under our care, underscoring our commitment to their holistic well-being.
- Finally, the psychosocial well-being of parents of children with autism enrolled at the Joy Center has demonstrably improved, evidenced by their enhanced engagement within the community. This highlights the positive effect of our support, creating a more confident and connected parental network.

## **Family Group Support and Economic Empowerment**

### **Economic Empowerment**

For the first six months of the 2025 fiscal year, the Nia Foundation initiated a robust Family Economic Empowerment program, designed to uplift 40 mothers of children with autism residing in Addis Ababa, Butajira, Mekelle, Wolayts Sodo, and Dire Dawa. This comprehensive initiative aims to equip these mothers with the essential skills and resources required to establish sustainable income-generating activities (IGAs). Each participating mother will receive a crucial startup fund

of 90,000 ETB, enabling them to launch small businesses that can significantly support their families and reduce financial dependency. Beyond mere financial assistance, the program delivers practical training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and business management, equipping participants with knowledge and skills to operate successful and resilient enterprises.

Recognizing the unique challenges inherent in raising children with autism, a core objective of this program is to foster social inclusion and emotional well-being. This is achieved by actively creating peer support networks among participants and effectively linking them with relevant community services. Through ongoing mentorship and diligent close follow-up, the program aims to ensure not only the sustained economic stability of these mothers but also to cultivate greater societal understanding and acceptance of autism. Ultimately, this activity aspires to serve as a model for inclusive economic empowerment, specifically designed to uplift marginalized families while simultaneously encouraging communities to embrace diversity and foster resilience.

As an integral part of our program design, a comprehensive needs assessment was carried out to ensure the intervention's relevance and responsiveness to the actual conditions and priorities of our target beneficiaries. This assessment involved conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews with potential participants across four key cities: Mekelle, Butajira, Dire Dawa, and Sodo. These intimate conversations allowed us to gain invaluable firsthand insights into the daily realities, persistent struggles, and profound aspirations of mothers raising children with autism.

The interviews were carefully structured to explore not only economic needs but also the emotional, social, and logistical challenges that these families frequently encounter. Through this empathetic approach, we were able to move beyond superficial assumptions and develop a pragmatic understanding of each mother's unique context, empowering us to design support techniques that are both tailored and deeply empathetic.

Moreover, the assessment proved instrumental in identifying both existing barriers and untapped local opportunities within each community. We thoroughly evaluated factors such as the availability of markets, prevailing community attitudes toward autism, and the presence or absence of existing support networks. This detailed insight has crucially informed our participant selection process, which is based not solely on vulnerability but also on each mother's potential to meaningfully benefit from the program when matched with appropriate resources and personalized

mentorship. This rigorous process has significantly strengthened our confidence in the profound relevance of this intervention and has strategically positioned us to implement it with the highest degree of cultural sensitivity and local alignment.

## **Family Support and Training**

In the first six months of 2025, Nia Foundation's Family Empowerment initiatives have significantly enhanced the well-being of both participating families and children. A core component of these efforts, the Parents' Support Group Program, has been consistently held monthly. These sessions have served as a vital, supportive space where parents receive counseling, engage in discussions and consultations, and benefit from psychosocial and emotional support. A key element fostering community and shared learning has been the encouragement of experience-sharing among parents, allowing them to collectively navigate the complexities of raising children with autism, learn from each other's journeys, and develop effective coping mechanisms.

This comprehensive approach has proven highly beneficial, providing much-needed relief and valuable insights for parents. The program has demonstrably built the resilience and confidence of families. Notably, we observed noticeable behavioral improvements in children, particularly among those from newly joined families. Many parents articulated a profound sense of comfort in realizing they are not alone in their challenges. Our dedicated therapists further supported these families by offering tailored strategies to promote positive behaviors and developmental progress in their children. Feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing deep appreciation for the consistent support and professional guidance.

The counseling sessions, in particular, were frequently highlighted as instrumental in managing stress and strengthening emotional resilience. In response to this encouraging feedback and in alignment with our strategic objectives, the Foundation is committed to continuing these monthly meetings and counseling sessions. Furthermore, we plan to introduce additional workshops in the upcoming period, focusing on practical topics such as effective communication, stress management, and advanced coping strategies, to further empower and support families of children with autism.

## Autism Awareness and Community Mobilization (World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month) WAAD 2025.

### Joint Press Release for Enhanced Collaboration in Autism Services

On 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2025, at the Skylight Hotel, the Foundation successfully co-hosted a significant joint press release conference with Ministry of Health and Nehemiah Autism Center. Members of Ethiopian Autism Society, under establishment with the Motto *“Enhance Inclusion, Improve Access and Acceptance to Autism Services in Ethiopia”* **“በለቀ የአጋር አካላት ተሳትፎ፣ አካታችነትን በማጎልበት፣ በኢትዮጵያ የአቴዝም ተቀባይነት እና አገልግሎት ተደራሽነትን እናሻሽላለን!!”** This pivotal event brought together over 50 participants, including representatives from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Board of Directors, Autism Ambassadors, and families, alongside several Television, Radio, Print and Social media representatives who provided extensive coverage as well as live stream.



The press release was a powerful demonstration of unity, as more than 12 organizations from across Ethiopia, including Nehemiah Autism Center, Bright Autism Center, Bethel Adama Autism Center, Letaric Autism Center, Ado Kesina Autism Center, Igbet Intellectual Disability Association, Enat Tref Autism Center, Libam Autism and Women Empowerment Center, Milu' Foundation, etc. Convened with a shared commitment to improving the well-being of children with Autism, and other related intellectual disabilities.



The core message emphasized on the critical need to strengthen collaborative systems among organizations, schools, and governmental bodies working in the field of inclusive education and wellbeing of people on children and youth spectrum and related intellectual disabilities in Ethiopia. This session served as a catalyst, pooling diverse experiences, capacities, and accessibility frameworks to achieve greater impact and cultivate an environment conducive to meaningful change.

Building on last year's efforts, a significant ongoing initiative is the establishment of the "Ethiopian Autism Society." This robust society aims to unify all stakeholders in the sector, bringing together organizations dedicated to services for Autism and related developmental disabilities to effectively influence policy and advocacy efforts, significantly increase community awareness regarding Autism, and ultimately brighten the future of youth and children with Autism.



The long-term vision includes establishing a collaborative network to advocate for, promote, and rightfully claim demands, services, and protection from the government, addressing the current

scarcity of holistic rehabilitation services at a national level. The Nia Foundation is actively working towards multiplying and extending existing organizations, strengthening nascent initiatives, and replicating successful experiences and findings to reach remote communities, thereby addressing this pressing need.

### **World Autism Awareness Day Celebration Event (WAAD)**

The World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Day (WAAD) was vibrantly celebrated on April 2nd, 2025, at Joy Center for Autism Center. This significant annual event served its primary objective of raising public awareness about (ASD) through diverse initiatives, including robust media engagement, public gatherings, and community mobilization efforts. Furthermore, the celebration underscored the crucial goal of resource mobilization, embedded within all WAAD endeavors.

The event witnessed an impressive turnout of over 300 participants, creating a powerful collective presence. Attendees included the dedicated members of the Board of Directors, the committed staff of the Nia Foundation, and importantly, families and their children, whose presence truly embodied the spirit of the day. A strong network of support was evident through the participation

of volunteers, as well as teachers and therapists from esteemed sister organizations like Fikir Ethiopian and others.



Reinforcing the collaborative spirit, representatives from key government agencies and various stakeholders were also present, signifying their commitment to advancing autism services in Ethiopia. The celebration was also highlighted generously support of stakeholder and partners for the Center of Excellence project, including JJcon Construction, Bamacon Construction, Atcon Architectural Engineering, Zemi’s Friends Group, and Ethio Telecom, whose contributions are vital to our mission. On the occasion we also launched “Miyaziya for Nia Foundation Campaign” offered by Ethio- Telecom.



Throughout the day, various speakers delivered impactful messages concerning **ASD**. Discussions focused on the importance of comprehensive therapies and robust family support groups; alongside targeted awareness creation activities designed to dispel common myths surrounding Autism within the community.

Emphasizing the fundamental rights of individuals with autism, speakers passionately advocated for their right to education and underscored the urgent need to enhance the health and overall well-being of Autistic children across Ethiopia. A truly moving highlight of the celebration was the series of performances and talent shows presented by the youth and children with Autism. These showcases powerfully demonstrated their unique abilities and celebrated their remarkable empowerment, captivating the audience and inspiring a deeper understanding and acceptance.

The event was further enriched by multiple entertaining activities and successful fundraising initiatives, all meticulously planned to amplify awareness of Autism within society and to garner essential financial support for the ongoing construction of the Joy Center of Excellence.



## Media Engagement and Involvements

During the first half of the 2025 fiscal year, Nia Foundation has strategically leveraged media to significantly enhance its outreach and support for individuals with autism. Recognizing technology's immense potential for communication, skill development, social interaction, and sharing experiences, our initiatives have focused on integrating visual aids, social stories, videos, and interactive applications to deliver engaging and personalized learning experiences.

This partnership is crucial for tailoring our media strategies to individual needs and preferences, while always maintaining a balanced approach that complements in-person interactions and ensures sensory-friendly environments. Beyond our digital platforms, we have also sustained strong engagement with mainstream conventional media outlets across Ethiopia.

Our major events have received coverage from prominent broadcasters, including FBC, EBC, EBS, and Ahadu, as well as various regional media. In addition to news coverage, one-on-one interview sessions have been successfully conducted on both radio and television programs, providing deeper insights into our work and the critical issues faced by the autism community.

Substantial progress has been made in boosting our social media presence and engagement, effectively addressing community needs and showcasing the breadth of our services. Since the previous year, we have actively established and maintained various social media platforms, ensuring consistent updates to the organization's online appearance and content. The success of

these activities highlights the ongoing necessity for innovative approaches to raise awareness about the Joy Center and autism through digital channels. To further amplify our reach and impact within the community, we are actively collaborating with Tech-Teka Solution, a team of highly professional volunteers and signed two-year partnership agreement in order to lead the partnership to higher impact.



### **Fostering Understanding and Collaboration: Joy Center Guided Visits:**

To cultivate a deeper understanding of the daily lives and specialized educational methodologies employed for children with autism, the Joy Center for Autism facilitated a comprehensive series of guided visits. These visits were specifically orchestrated for a diverse range of stakeholders, including university students, policymakers, representatives from Civil Society Organizations

(CSOs), and media professionals. As a key component of our broader World Autism Awareness Month initiatives, these structured tours aimed to significantly promote public comprehension of autism and illuminate the Center's holistic approach to supporting individuals across the spectrum. These visits proved to be an invaluable platform for offering firsthand exposure, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and building crucial relationships with key societal actors.

Throughout the month of April, the Center proudly welcomed over 200 visitors. This diverse group included university students from critical departments such as special needs education, psychology, social work, and public health, all eager to gain practical insights. Additionally, the Center hosted influential policymakers, dedicated civil society organization representatives, local authorities, inquisitive media professionals, and vital development partners, all of whom engaged directly with our programs and the children we serve.

### **Distribution of Awareness Materials: Informing and Educating the Public**

As part of our commitment to widespread public education, above 500 hundred of essential brochures, posters, and information sheets were meticulously printed and widely disseminated during various events and field activities throughout this period. The content of these materials was carefully crafted to provide crucial information on recognizing the early signs of autism, effectively debunking common myths and misconceptions surrounding the condition, and passionately promoting a culture of acceptance and understanding within communities.

### **Regional Level Engagements and Awareness Creation**

#### **Training and Capacity Building: Dire Dawa**

During the first six months of the 2025 fiscal year, the Joy Center for Autism proudly organized and successfully delivered a comprehensive training program in Dire Dawa City. This initiative was specifically designed to empower mothers of children with (ASD) and related developmental disabilities, alongside key local stakeholders. The program's core objective was to disseminate essential knowledge, cultivate practical caregiving skills, and foster a robust, supportive environment for both children and their families within the community.



The training sessions dedicated to mothers were meticulously structured to equip them with practical strategies and profound insights necessary for more effective management and understanding of autism. Participants gained a significantly clearer comprehension of the diverse realities and manifestations across the autism spectrum, while also learning to critically challenge common myths and misconceptions that often impede understanding and acceptance. Furthermore, they were guided through proven techniques for implementing positive behavior support, enhancing communication skills tailored to their children's individual needs, and establishing structured and predictable home environments that promote stability and development.

Beyond the acquisition of practical parenting skills, these sessions underscored the critical importance of maternal well-being. Stress management techniques were shared, and mothers were actively encouraged to prioritize self-care while building vital connections and a sense of community with other families navigating similar experiences.

Stakeholders were actively encouraged to critically reflect on their respective roles in supporting inclusion and were guided through evidence-based best practices for effectively responding to the unique needs of children and families affected by autism.



A significant and tangible outcome of these discussions was the formulation of collaborative action plans. These plans are poised to promote inclusive education, facilitate the establishment of localized support groups, and substantially enhance community-wide awareness. Participants collectively committed to the formation of a multidisciplinary coordination team, a crucial step towards streamlining and improving access to essential services across various sectors. Additionally, discussions explored innovative opportunities to economically empower mothers of children with autism through targeted income-generating initiatives, explicitly recognizing the profound link between caregiver well-being and the sustainable support of the family unit.





### **Butajira City Initiatives, Central Ethiopia Regional State**

During this reporting period, the Nia Foundation further extended its reach by conducting comprehensive training sessions and discussions with mothers of children with Autism and related developmental disabilities, as well as with key stakeholders, in Butajira City, Central Ethiopia Regional State. These strategic initiatives were designed to impart essential knowledge and practical strategies for effective management and understanding of autism, foster a nurturing and supportive community, and ultimately enhance the holistic well-being of children and their families within the region.



The training sessions specifically for mothers were meticulously developed to equip them with practical knowledge and invaluable skills for the effective handling and parenting of children with autism. Participants gained critical insights into the realities of autism, actively dispelled common myths and misconceptions, and developed a deeper understanding of the spectrum's diverse manifestations. They received structured instruction in positive behavior support strategies, tailored communication techniques addressing their children's unique needs, and practical methods for creating structured and predictable home environments that are conducive to development.



Crucially, the sessions also addressed the vital aspect of stress management, empowering mothers with effective tools for self-care and actively fostering a supportive community network among them. This dual focus on practical parenting skills and emotional well-being significantly strengthened the mothers' capacity to confidently navigate the inherent challenges of raising children with autism, promoting resilience and shared experiences.



Furthermore, we engaged in intensive training and discussions with a broad array of influential stakeholders, including representatives from the Regional Health Bureau, the Butajira City Administration, and the

Education Bureau, alongside other like-minded governmental agencies. A remarkable outcome of these collaborative activities was the formation of a dedicated group by the stakeholders themselves, committed to providing ongoing support for autistic children and their families in Butajira. This strong local commitment was further evidenced by the laying of foundation stones for the construction of the Enate Teref Autism Center in Butajira City, a monumental step towards establishing a dedicated facility for autism services in the region. The Nia Foundation was also formally recognized by these local authorities for its pioneering efforts and significant contributions to the community, marking a powerful testament to the impact of our work.

## Laying Foundation Stone for the Autism Center at Butajira City: Central Ethiopia Regional State.

During this reporting period, the Nia Foundation also proudly marked the National Birth Defect Day Celebration with a momentous event in Butajira City, Central Ethiopia Regional State. A highlight of this occasion was the official laying of the foundation stone for the Butajira Mother Tref Autism Center at Mekcho School in the East Gurage Zone. This significant undertaking is poised to establish a crucial resource, serving hundreds of children and youth with autism and related developmental disabilities, alongside their families, not only within Butajira City but also in the surrounding zones.



The ceremony was distinguished by the presence of esteemed officials, including the Mayor of Butajira City, the Deputy Head of the Health Bureau, and the Head of the Social Affairs Bureau, among other various office heads and dedicated employees. Their attendance underscored a strong commitment from local leadership. Mothers of children with autism, present at the event, expressed profound gratitude for the establishment of this much-needed center. They delivered impassioned messages, emphasizing the immense potential for improvement in their children's lives with proper care and calling for sustained collective support from all stakeholders.

His Excellency Ahmed Abdo, the Mayor of Butajira City, acknowledged the pivotal and transformative role played by the Nia Foundation. He specifically commended our comprehensive engagement, ranging from initial awareness-raising campaigns and extensive training programs to ongoing monitoring efforts since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding.



Mayor Abdo lauded the Foundation's invaluable past contributions and expressed anticipation for our continued support, underscoring our vital importance to families and the broader community. In recognition of these significant contributions over the years, the Nia Foundation was honored with a certificate of appreciation, presented by the Mayor and the Deputy Head of the Central Ethiopia Regional Health Bureau. Adding to the momentous occasion, exciting news was confirmed from Butajira town: a generous 3000 m<sup>2</sup> plot of land was officially dedicated by the Central Ethiopia Region Eastern Gurage Zone, Butajira Town Mayor's Office for the construction of the Autism and Related Developmental Disability Rehabilitation and Care Center

Further symbolizing the deep appreciation for our work, the Mayor and the Deputy Head of the Health Bureau presented the *traditional Gabi award* and gifts to the Nia Foundation's Executive Director, Mrs. Elleni Damtew, and Program Director, Mr. Mengistu Wolde.



This substantial land allocation represents a monumental step forward, promising to serve hundreds of families from the town and its surrounding areas, cementing a future where comprehensive support for individuals with autism is within reach.

**Awareness Campaign conducted at Tigray Regional State, Mekele.**

As a vital component of the broader National Birth Defect Management Week, which was officially launched on March 3rd, 2025, under the impactful national theme “Advancing Prevention, Care, and Inclusion Systems for Birth Defects”, the Nia Foundation actively collaborated with the Ministry of Health of Ethiopia, key development partners, health institutions, and civil society organizations. This concerted effort resulted in the implementation of a comprehensive series of nationwide awareness and advocacy activities. These crucial initiatives were meticulously carried out across all 14 regional states of Ethiopia, with the overarching objectives of significantly raising public consciousness about birth defects, promoting early detection and intervention strategies, and strengthening inclusive systems of care and support for affected individuals and their families.

Neurodevelopmental disabilities, encompassing conditions such as (ASD), Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability, and related conditions, were strategically identified as one of the five priority focus areas of this extensive national campaign. Throughout the week-long observance, our dedicated advocacy and awareness efforts successfully reached thousands of individuals across six distinct regions. These efforts emphatically underscored the critical importance of

rehabilitation services, the establishment of inclusive systems, and robust support mechanisms for affected individuals, all achieved through profound collaboration with both governmental bodies and various community stakeholders.



In parallel with the broad awareness campaign, the Nia Foundation conducted crucial assessments and provided essential family counseling sessions for 85 children diagnosed with Autism, Down Syndrome, and Intellectual Disabilities in both the Tigray and Central Ethiopia regions. These targeted activities represent a meaningful and tangible step forward in enhancing awareness, facilitating early identification, and providing crucial support for families navigating the challenges of developmental disabilities. We remain steadfastly committed to this vital mission and extend our profound gratitude to the Ministry of Health, the Developmental and Intellectual Disability Network of Ethiopia, and all our partners for their invaluable collaboration in this critical national effort.



## Outcomes of the regional engagements and Autism Awareness Campaign

Our strategic regional engagements and dedicated Autism Awareness Campaigns during this reporting period have yielded significant and positive outcomes, contributing to a more informed and supportive environment for individuals with autism and their families.

- **Increased Knowledge of Autism's Impact:** Our initiatives effectively disseminated comprehensive knowledge regarding the impacts of Autism and other related developmental disabilities on families, fostering a deeper and more empathetic understanding among all stakeholders.
- **Widespread Assessment and Counseling:** We successfully conducted assessments for hundreds of children with Autism and related developmental disabilities, accurately identifying their neurodevelopmental disorder conditions. Crucially, accompanying counseling sessions were provided to their parents, instilling hope and equipping them with fundamental information on how to best support their child's special needs.
- **Family and Sibling Empowerment:** In alignment with our strategic plan, significant empowerment and psychological support were provided to families and siblings of children with Autism and related developmental disabilities, strengthening their resilience and coping mechanisms.

- **Facilitated Knowledge Exchange:** Technical support and experience-sharing sessions created invaluable opportunities for participants to learn from both the strengths and challenges encountered across various efforts in the autism support ecosystem.
- **Essential Material Support:** The provision of material support to all families in need played a pivotal role in encouraging and alleviating the burdens faced by struggling families and mothers caring for autistic children, providing tangible relief and motivation.
- **Catalyzed Partnerships and Future Cooperation:** Our proactive discussions with stakeholders and regional government agencies ignited crucial partnerships, effectively paving the way for robust collaboration and future cooperation. This commitment was formally solidified through the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Nia Foundation and all regional counterparts, establishing a concrete framework for sustained partnership and joint efforts.

## **Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Initiatives: Pioneering Inclusive Care**

Recognizing the unique and often unmet sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents and youth with (ASD), the Joy Center for Autism has actively advanced efforts to develop inclusive and accessible SRH education and services. These efforts are deeply grounded in the understanding that individuals with autism, like all others, possess the fundamental right to comprehensive, age-appropriate SRH information and care that is meticulously tailored to their individual cognitive, emotional, and communication needs.

In close and critical collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health, the Joy Center has been leading the pioneering development of a national-level SRH manual. This groundbreaking manual is specifically designed to guide professionals working with individuals with autism, serving as a practical, user-friendly resource for a broad and diverse range of stakeholders. This includes health professionals, educators, caregivers, social workers, therapists, and counselors, ensuring a consistent and informed approach to SRH support across various sectors.

A high-level delegation from the Federal Ministry of Health, comprising directors and technical officers, conducted an official and impactful visit to the Joy Center. During this visit, the Ministry's

team thoroughly observed the Center’s therapeutic environment, engaged in meaningful interactions with staff, and meticulously reviewed the current approaches being utilized to support youth with autism in matters related to personal development and SRH. This engagement fostered a productive dialogue on the systemic gaps currently impeding SRH service accessibility for persons with autism and underscored the urgent need for policy-backed, truly inclusive service models. The Ministry’s representatives expressed strong interest in continuing this vital collaboration and emphasized their unwavering commitment to working jointly with the Joy Center to address these critical needs.



These ongoing efforts mark a crucial and transformative milestone in advancing the rights, dignity, and overall well-being of individuals with autism in Ethiopia. By proactively addressing a historically overlooked area, the Joy Center is not only pioneering inclusive SRH service provision but is also actively shaping national policy and practice through strategic partnerships and evidence-based advocacy.

The collaboration with the Ministry of Health establishes a powerful precedent for multi-sectoral engagement, ensuring that adolescents and youth with autism are no longer excluded from vital health information and services. Instead, they are being empowered to lead safe, informed, and autonomous lives, fostering a more equitable and supportive society.

## Volunteer and Internship Engagement

During this reporting period, the Joy Center for Autism has been a vibrant hub for a diverse array of volunteers and interns, significantly contributing to our mission and expanding our reach. Students from various governmental and non-governmental universities and colleges, including graduating classes from Hope University College, along with students from primary and secondary schools, engaged with our center for internships, volunteering, and research purposes. This active participation underscores a growing interest and commitment within the academic community towards supporting individuals with autism.

Beyond formal placements, our center welcomed 40 students from both governmental and private institutions for dedicated visits. These students spent valuable time at our center, gaining firsthand insights and receiving detailed explanations regarding the overall goals and achievements of the Nia Foundation and the Joy Center for Autism. Students from AA Technology Compass engaged on apparent mission. They visited our center, and wider discussions were held on the operations of Joy Center.

These exposures were instrumental in fostering a deeper understanding of autism and the challenges faced by families, equipping these students with a profound sense of purpose and a desire to contribute to their communities. All those involved on the volunteer and internship engagement were strongly encouraged to share their experiences and newly acquired knowledge with their peers and broader networks, a crucial step that contributes significantly to **increasing awareness, promoting acceptance, and advocating for the rights of individuals with autism** across wider segments of society.



## Joy Center of Excellence for Autism Constructing Construction Project

The ongoing construction of the **Project Joy Center of Excellence for Autism** remains a paramount focus for the Nia Foundation during this reporting period. This critical endeavor involves continuous fundraising activities, diligent monitoring of the ongoing construction progress, the orchestration of various events, strategic meetings, and vital networking efforts. Our team has consistently engaged with diverse partners and prepared compelling proposals to secure the necessary resources.

During this reporting period, significant milestones were achieved through collaborations with both governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Key activities included the formalization of agreements with a construction company and a consulting company to diligently pursue the ongoing construction.



Despite the robust efforts dedicated to capital hunting, which involved extensive communication with various stakeholders such as the Addis Ababa City Administration Mayor's Office, the Finance and Economy Bureau, sustained contact with the Diaspora community, and engagement with individual donors and partner organizations, securing additional capital for the remaining

construction phases continues to be a formidable challenge. Nonetheless, with the funds obtained, the crucial purchase of steel required for construction up to the sixth floor and the over structural works have been completed.

We are deeply grateful for the invaluable contributions from our partners, notably the Construction Consultant, who has provided their professional services free of charge. Their employees have contributed their expertise and labor on their own payments, and various entities have provided direct material support. A notable achievement was the Ethio- Telecom short code campaign, also generated significant revenue specifically to support the construction costs. Furthermore, numerous individuals and companies have actively engaged in the process by providing support in the form of construction materials and sand.

Currently, we are pleased to report that the overall structural works for the center have been finalized. The immediate priority and next critical tasks on our timeline involve the completion of the roofing and various finishing works, bringing us closer to realizing this essential facility for the autism community.

## **Program and Project Related Activities**

### **Funding and Project Development**

In this fiscal year, the Nia Foundation has actively pursued diverse funding opportunities, strategically preparing and submitting project proposals to various organizations, currently we are working on GIDABO Policy Center, and UNICEF, projects put into implementation. Complementing these institutional grants, we have engaged in direct, in-person outreach to various individuals, organizations, and commercial banks across Ethiopia. These intensive "grant hunting" efforts are specifically aimed at securing additional resources for the ongoing development of the Joy Center of Excellence and to expand our "one child-one sponsorship" initiatives, ensuring sustained support for our programs. We have submitted projects to Rotary Club of Addis Ababa West, One Child Sponsorship Projects to number of Private Banks.

## Active Project Implementation follow-up.

### MIVA Project

Over the past four months, from January to April 2025, the Nia Foundation has effectively utilized the transport-related subsidies generously provided by MIVA. This strategic support has significantly enhanced our programmatic reach, strengthened community engagement, and improved the overall delivery of services, particularly through the Joy Center for Autism and its extensive outreach initiatives. The following key achievements demonstrably highlight the profound impact of this transport subsidy:

Over the past four months, a total of 32 children with autism and related developmental disorders have directly benefited from the invaluable transport support facilitated by the MIVA grant. These children are efficiently transported to and from the Joy Center for Autism in two shifts of 16 participants each, a system that allows the organization to maximize the utilization of the vehicle and ensure consistent, uninterrupted access to our vital center-based services. The provision of this dedicated transport service has played an absolutely crucial role in significantly reducing absenteeism and dropout rates, thereby enabling these children to attend regular rehabilitation sessions, engage in essential educational activities, and access necessary medical appointments without interruption. This stable and reliable access to services has contributed remarkably to measurable improvements in their social interaction, behavior, communication, and self-help skills.

During this reporting period, an estimated 128 individuals have indirectly benefited from the transportation support provided by the MIVA grant. These indirect beneficiaries primarily include parents, siblings, and other extended family members of the 32 children directly receiving services. On average, each child is supported by four close family members who were previously burdened with the significant financial, emotional, and physical stress associated with transporting their children to and from the center, often having to rely on unreliable and frequently socially challenging public transport options. The introduction of the new dedicated vehicle has provided substantial relief to these families from daily transport struggles, allowing them to redirect their limited financial resources towards other essential household needs. Moreover, a marked improvement in the emotional well-being of caregivers has been observed, as they are now less exposed to the public stigma and instances of bullying often encountered when accompanying

children with autism on public transport. This profound shift has positively impacted overall household stability and significantly reduced the psychosocial strain previously borne by many families.

### **Engagement in Awareness Raising Activities:**

In strategic alignment with the global recognition of April as World Autism Awareness Month, the Nia Foundation and Joy Center for Autism undertook a comprehensive and multifaceted community awareness campaign. This campaign was specifically aimed at profoundly increasing public understanding, acceptance, and support for individuals with (ASD). The awareness initiatives were meticulously designed to reach a wide and diverse range of stakeholders, including families, other Autism Centers operating in Ethiopia, key governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education along with their subsequent regional offices, various non-governmental partners, and the general public, through diverse platforms and engaging strategies.

The Nia Foundation has made significant progress in advancing its mission through the effective utilization of the transport subsidy granted by MIVA. The dedicated vehicle has contributed immensely to scaling up our outreach efforts, enabling the organization to access remote communities and regions that previously faced severe limitations in accessing autism awareness and rehabilitation information. This enhanced mobility allowed our team to directly engage thousands of individuals in targeted awareness campaigns, offering tailored support and proactively promoting early detection and inclusion strategies for children with autism and related developmental disorders.

Furthermore, the grant played a vital role in facilitating the smooth and efficient implementation of Nia's youth-led digital autism awareness campaign, which experienced rapid expansion across wider geographical areas. The transport support enabled team members to conduct essential onsite coordination visits, rigorously monitor campaign activities, and provide crucial logistical support to partner schools and local bureaus. As a direct result of this enhanced mobility, the campaign successfully reached over 800 children in its early phase, significantly promoting understanding and acceptance of neurodiversity at the grassroots level.

Internally, the transport support has demonstrably improved program execution and overall coordination. The enhanced ability to move swiftly and efficiently between various sites allowed for more effective monitoring, better follow-up on field activities, and a considerable reduction in delays in program implementation. Staff could conduct timely supervisions, organize critical stakeholder meetings without interruption, and respond promptly to operational needs, all of which contributed to a notable increase in overall organizational efficiency and impact.

Moreover, the new vehicle made it possible to extend vital services to previously underserved communities. Through strategic collaboration with local administrations, the Foundation successfully reached parents and community leaders in remote areas, providing them with crucial training on autism and inclusive education practices. These targeted outreach efforts empowered families and played a pivotal role in fostering community-based support structures for children with special needs, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability and local ownership of these invaluable initiatives.

Finally, the transport capacity enabled crucial home visits and individualized follow-up for children who, due to limitations of accommodation, could not regularly attend the center. Over two dozen families received custom-made consultations and assessments during this period, significantly strengthening the continuum of care and ensuring that no child was left behind due to logistical barriers. This comprehensive support not only improved the well-being of the children but also substantially reduced the emotional and financial burden on their families, powerfully reinforcing the Nia Foundation's holistic approach to disability inclusion and support.

### **GIDABO Project: “Enhance Holistic Autism Rehabilitation Care and Promote Autism Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Approaches”.**

Since November 2024, the Nia Foundation has been actively implementing the comprehensive project titled “Enhance Holistic Autism Rehabilitation Care and Promote Autism Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Approaches”. This vital initiative is a collaborative effort with the GODABO Policy Advocacy Center and involves robust partnerships with key governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and the respective Bureaus of Education, Health, and Women and Children, Social Affairs in Addis Ababa City and various regional cities' administrations.

The overarching goal of this project is multi-faceted: to strengthen the provision of center-based holistic Autism rehabilitation programs, expand autism rehabilitation services through crucial home and community-based programs, and significantly increase awareness and capacity among parents, government agencies, stakeholders, and community members regarding autism and related developmental disabilities. Furthermore, the project aims to address the specific needs of autistic children, facilitate their mainstreaming within the community, contribute to the protection of their rights and well-being, and crucially, improve their Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH).

Supporting this ambitious project goal are several clearly defined project objectives for the first six months of the 2025 fiscal year: We have been working,

- **Enhance Center-Based Rehabilitation Services:** To improve the delivery of quality comprehensive center-based rehabilitation services, with the aim of increasing the number of children and adolescents with autism supported from 80 to 120.
- **Economic Empowerment for Parents:** We have conducted assessments in order to identify beneficiaries to provide economic empowerment to 30 low-income parents of children with autism through employment opportunities within the organization's income-generating initiatives.
- **Capacity Building for Policymakers:** To empower 50 key policymakers and enforcers from federal and regional governments by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the special SRH needs of persons with autism, thereby establishing model autism-friendly facilities.
- **Enhanced Psychosocial Support:** Monthly parents support and consultation psychosocial support was continued in empowering 100 parents and families of children with autism with stronger coping mechanisms and community connections.
- **Strengthen Organizational Capacity:** We have procured materials (Laptops, Copier, laminating machine, printers and other supply items and office utility) to enhance the organizational capacity for quality comprehensive center-based rehabilitation services by providing technical capacity-building support to four other autism centers.

The progress of Gidabo project implementation has been evaluated with the program team from Gidabo Policy Center and detail project implementation program and financial report was submitted.

### **UNICEF Project: Empowering Communities: Enhancing Support for Autism Spectrum Disorder in Ethiopia**

Building upon extensive prior autism awareness campaigns conducted in the region, the activities undertaken in Butajira and Dire Dawa during this reporting period have demonstrated a significant and positive trajectory toward sustained community engagement and the fostering of localized support systems. Pre-existing relationships meticulously cultivated with community members and key government officials proved instrumental, enabling the highly efficient recruitment of caregivers and robust stakeholder engagement. This collaborative and integrated approach was crucial in achieving the ambitious targets set for both caregiver training and comprehensive awareness events.

Notably, a tangible outcome of the growing awareness and advocacy was the proactive response from the Butajira City Mayor's office. In a remarkable show of local commitment, the Mayor's office established a dedicated task force specifically to support a local mothers' group that is striving to establish its own autism support center. Concurrently, the Letaric Autism Center in Dire Dawa received official recognition and has commendably commenced providing much-needed home-to-home support to children on the spectrum and their caregivers. These significant developments powerfully highlight the concrete impact of the awareness campaign in fostering genuine local ownership and driving the development of sustainable, community-based solutions for autism support.

### **Continued National Initiative: Public Awareness Raising Campaign on Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities**

The national initiative to raise public awareness on Autism and other developmental disabilities continued with focused campaigns, particularly in Dire Dawa and Butajira. Our objective was to train 30 caregivers and 20 stakeholders in each of these regional cities, thereby building local capacity and understanding.

A total of 60 caregivers and 40 stakeholders successfully completed training across the two regional cities. Two intensive awareness-raising training sessions were conducted: one in Butajira and another in Dire Dawa. We placed on the importance of support groups and dedicated centers for children with disabilities, benefiting both the child and the caregiver. Key sectors, including health, education, women and social affairs, city administration, job and skills offices, governmental schools, and major hospitals within the respective cities. Participants received a concise yet comprehensive training on Autism and related developmental disorders, which was followed by a dynamic panel discussion. This discussion, led by representatives from each city's mayor's office/administration, critically examined existing gaps in addressing the needs of children with these disabilities and culminated in the formulation of actionable plans. Each representative was tasked with ensuring that these vulnerable children and their families receive the services they desperately need.

### **Economic Empowerment of Mothers with a Child on the Spectrum:**

Significant progress has been achieved in the economic empowerment of mothers of children on the spectrum, a critical activity supported through a strong partnership between the Nia Foundation, the Lideta Subcity Woreda 04 Women and Children's Affairs Office, and the Job and Skills Office. A total of 10 mothers from the Woreda were carefully selected and provided with 5 days of dedicated business training. Following a rigorous selection process, 5 mothers were identified as recipients of seed money to launch their own entrepreneurial businesses. Identified women are now actively engaged in drafting detailed business plans with ongoing, dedicated support from the project team, demonstrating a profound commitment to building sustainable businesses and achieving long-term economic stability for their families.

### **Student Sponsorship and Center Resource Enhancement:**

A truly significant achievement this reporting period has been securing 12 months of full intervention cost coverage for 20 students at the Joy Center for Autism. This invaluable sponsorship enables the center to provide comprehensive support, encompassing a wide range of critical services including therapeutic interventions (Applied Behavior Analysis - ABA, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, play therapy, social skills training), essential

educational services, ongoing staff training, robust family support programs, and necessary materials and supplies specifically tailored to address the evolving needs of our students with autism. This holistic approach ensures that students receive the multifaceted support necessary to maximize their individual potential.

- 20 students, previously facing financial hardship and unable to afford the intervention costs at the center, have been granted 12 months of full sponsorship, ensuring uninterrupted access to vital services.
- Advance payments were successfully made for purchasing 10 tables and 20 chairs to further enhance the learning and therapeutic environment for students at the center.

### **Matching Fund for Sustainable Future and Partnership with Ethio- Telecom (Miyaziya For Nia Foundation)**

During this reporting period, the Nia Foundation actively implemented the matching fund for sustainable future activities, working in close partnership with Ethio-Telecom and other partner organizations at both national and regional levels. This initiative significantly contributed to the promotion of Ethio Telecom's business activities and aimed at increasing their social media followers. We also collaborated with mainstream media outlets and social media platforms to design and conduct a comprehensive digital awareness and Ethio- Telecom Matching Fund Initiatives program campaign. This wide-reaching campaign leveraged various channels, including *Facebook Live Stream, TikTok, YouTube Live Stream, FM radios, TV broadcasts, and Telegram* conversations, significantly expanding our reach to a broader audience.



We implemented proactive approach in leading and communicating fundraising campaigns under the Matching Fund program, in partnership with Ethio Telecom, able to mobilized our extensive network of organization members, partners, and ambassadors. The foundation effectively disseminated awareness of the campaign through various communication channels, a strategy that ensured maximum outreach and encouraged greater community participation and engagement.

To further amplify the impact of its fundraising efforts, Nia Foundation actively shared and rebroadcasts campaign messages through its various digital platforms. These efforts not only highlight the critical objectives of the campaign but also prominently showcase Ethio Telecom’s significant business contributions during the matching campaign period. By integrating promotional content with fundraising appeals, the foundation effectively enhances the credibility of both entities involved, fostering a stronger partnership.



Leveraging the immense power of social media and influential voices, the Nia Foundation actively engaged its ambassadors, influencers, volunteers, and journalists to further disseminate the campaign message. Their invaluable participation helped to significantly raise public awareness and encouraged individuals to contribute to our fundraising initiatives. Moreover, official ambassadors played a pivotal role in creatively reshaping the campaign’s content on their personal platforms, thereby expanding the program's reach.

Accountability and transparency remain integral to the foundation’s operations. This collaborative engagement is instrumental in driving broader participation in our fundraising activities. A well-rounded communication approach is essential for campaign success, and Nia Foundation seamlessly integrated both digital media and radio strategies to achieve this. Social media

promotions, live events, televised content, and direct engagement ensure that the campaign reaches a diverse and broad audience, making fundraising efforts more effective and impactful. Storytelling continues to serve as a powerful tool in reinforcing the foundation’s mission. By sharing compelling testimonials and real-life stories of beneficiaries directly supported by the matching fund,



Collaboration with external partners, including various government agencies, corporations, and other non-profit organizations, further enhanced the foundation’s ability to drive long-term impact. Establishing multiple and diverse sources of support ensures sustainability and significantly broadens opportunities for humanitarian outreach, extending beyond Ethio Telecom’s contributions. Ultimately, the sustained success of Nia Foundation’s fundraising initiatives under the Matching Fund program critically relies on strategic communication, robust partnerships, and effective resource mobilization. Through continuously leveraging our dedicated ambassadors, pervasive social media presence, and invaluable corporate collaborations, we are steadfastly

strengthening our position as a leading humanitarian organization committed to driving positive and lasting change.



## Progress on Financial Management

To ensure the smooth and effective operation of the Nia Foundation's programs, the finance department has consistently carried out a range of key tasks during this reporting period:

- **Maintaining Accurate Financial Records:** Rigorous attention has been paid to ensuring all financial records are accurate and complete, providing a clear and reliable overview of our fiscal health.
- **Regular Financial Review:** We have regularly reviewed our revenue and expenses, meticulously comparing budgeted versus actual amounts, and analyzing cash flows to maintain financial stability and strategic allocation of resources.
- **Comprehensive Financial Reporting:** Both internal and external financial reports were prepared with thoroughness and precision, meeting all required standards for transparency and accountability.

- **Strengthening Internal Controls and Policies:** Significant efforts have been dedicated to developing and implementing robust internal controls and policies. This includes ensuring that internal controls for all financial transactions are meticulously documented, consistently followed, regularly reviewed, and updated as necessary. Furthermore, proactive risk assessments have been conducted to help prevent fraud and preserve the integrity of our financial data.
- **Audit Oversight:** The department has diligently prepared for and overseen the auditing process, including the follow-up of the audit conducted by external auditors, ensuring compliance and transparency.

Our sources of income have been diligently followed up, registered, and posted according to required procedures, demonstrating a diversified funding approach:

- Various Donations from supportive individuals and organizations.
- Family Contributions, reflecting the direct engagement and support from the communities we serve.

Regular monitoring of common expenditures has been continuously prioritized over the past six months, with a particular focus on:

- Income Tax, Pension, and Withholding Tax compliance.
- Salary Program Expenditure, ensuring timely and fair compensation for our dedicated staff.
- Therapy Materials procurement, ensuring our rehabilitation programs are well-equipped.
- Expenditures related to the Joy Center of Excellence Building Project, which remains a high-priority construction endeavor.

## **Financial Performance**

### **Financial Performance Overview: In the last five months**

- Total Revenue in 3,826,775.57 (25%).
- Program Expenditure: 12.262,800.49 (92 %0).
- Admin Expenditure: 1,049,496.33 (8 %).

- Total expenditure: 13,312,296.82.

## Challenges, the way forward and Lessons

### Challenges and the Way Forward

During this reporting period, the Nia Foundation experienced several key challenges that impacted project implementation and overall operational efficiency. These include:

- **Staffing Capacity:** A notable staff shortage, particularly in the crucial project management area, affected our ability to fully implement project activities as planned. Furthermore, the team encountered challenges related to unfamiliarity with the diverse reporting frameworks and specific budget utilization guidelines required by UNICEF, which subsequently impacted reporting timelines and accuracy.
- **Budgetary Constraints:** Rising market prices for key project inputs, such as hotel services and materials required for purchases, placed considerable pressure on our project budgets. We are actively seeking alternative suppliers and negotiating pricing agreements where possible; if not feasible, we are exploring opportunities with other projects to cover these additional costs. Additionally, due to double-digit inflation, the seed money disbursed to beneficiaries for economic empowerment is still low, impacting its capacity to fully cover the intended business plans. Continuous discussions are being held to support beneficiaries in selecting and adapting desirable business activities to mitigate this.
- **Higher Demand:** A much higher demand for caregiver training than initially anticipated proved to be another significant bottleneck. We received a substantial number of requests from caregivers of individuals with disabilities other than ASD, expressing a strong desire to participate in our training programs. This overwhelmingly indicates a wider, unmet need for disability support services within the broader community.
- **Shifting Funding Priorities:** The shifting focus of project calls towards recovery and war-affected areas has resulted in the rejection of several project proposals, as our primary focus areas did not align with these new priorities.
- **Limited Networking and Collaboration:** A recognized challenge was limited networking and collaboration with various like-minded organizations. To address this, the Nia

Foundation has been actively working to create and strengthen networking through review meetings, joint event organizations, and referral linkages.

- **Beneficiary Expectation Management:** Expectations of beneficiaries occasionally exceeded the capacity of the project, posing another challenge. To minimize this confusion, frequent formal and non-formal communications are being maintained with beneficiaries to ensure they understand the project's true nature and expected achievements. Interventions are also being aligned with government priorities, and close collaboration is being maintained with Woreda Offices during monitoring and evaluation to ensure realistic expectations and effective implementation.

Addressing these challenges will be crucial for ensuring equitable access to training and fostering long-term impact. The strong foundation laid through these diverse activities will be strategically leveraged for future initiatives aimed at expanding support services and building robust community capacity.

## Lessons Learned

During this reporting period, the Nia Foundation gained invaluable insights that will significantly inform our future strategies and enhance project effectiveness.

- We've learned that even minimal assistance can unlock immense potential in mothers of children with autism, enabling them to transform their lives. The comprehensive progress and enthusiasm witnessed post-training and seed money disbursement clearly demonstrate this impact.
- Building economic capacity proves to be profoundly beneficial for our targeted beneficiaries, many of whom have been living in precarious conditions due to economic, health, and social vulnerabilities. Empowering them financially addresses a critical need.
- Our experience indicates that a personal approach to fundraising activities is more productive than solely responding to recent project calls. While we continue to pursue external funding, managing our time effectively to prioritize personal outreach remains a key strategy.

- Alignment of project plans with key partners' strategies, coupled with close collaboration and involving partners as decision-makers, has been instrumental in fostering genuine ownership and significantly enhancing project implementation.
- The importance of having a robust project structure and strengthening partnerships with like-minded organizations cannot be overstated. This approach maximizes impact and leverages collective resources more effectively.
- We've learned that successful project implementation, particularly in this complex field, demands multifaceted interventions and strong partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders. The crucial role of integrating Woreda and sub-city structures into project execution has become particularly evident.
- Our experience confirms that a comprehensive rehabilitation program — encompassing life skills training, reproductive health education, health education, experience sharing, and business and vocational skills training — consistently leads to progressive skill development and positive behavioral changes among beneficiaries.
- Advanced communication and consistent collaboration with relevant stakeholders represent another major lesson learned from our project execution thus far. We've observed how crucial this is in effectively engaging local government and community structures to support project implementation and sustainability.