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# **“Everyone wants to help, but they don’t know where to start”**

In 2012, a group of staff members at Strathmore University (Nairobi, Kenya) inspired by St. Josemaría’s life and teaching started Macheo, an academic support program for students from settlements near the university. Macheo later sparked Mawio and Sulwe, similar programs for groups in other areas.

09/26/2025

In 2012, a group of Strathmore University staff asked what they could do, personally and institutionally, to make a greater impact on the world around them. That question led to several others: “What’s our forte? What are we good at? How can we use our strengths to help the people in our immediate neighbourhood?”

Some of the answers came quickly: as a university, it was patently obvious that education was their forte. Other answers were only found after more searching. For instance, inspiration for *how* to impact and uplift others through education came from a story online about an initiative halfway across the world: Midtown-Metro Achievement Centers.

Midtown-Metro, then almost 50 years old, had been born in 1965 with a few members and cooperators of

Opus Dei in Chicago (United States) who wanted to help at-risk inner city boys. Midtown began as a summer sports and skills program for twelve boys in 1965, expanded with a sister project for girls (Metro), and grew into a year-round after-school and holiday program that serves over a thousand boys and girls annually.

### **The birth of Macheo**

So that small group of staff from Strathmore began what came to be known as Macheo, a weekend and holiday program that serves high school students from three informal settlements near the university. The focus is academic, with students from the settlements coming to the university on Saturday and school holidays for learning programs that include remedial classes in math and languages, practical life skills, and mentoring from university staff and students.

We caught up with Michael, who has been working at Macheo for over 10 years and was able to share stories of students from very difficult circumstances who broke with many of their bad influences, passed their high school national examinations, went to post-secondary institutions, and are now working at stable, paying jobs and motivating their siblings and friends.

Of course, he told us, not every case appears to be a success story. But those who do grow through Macheo make all the work worthwhile. The key thing is consistency: putting in the work, showing up, and encouraging the students. Some of the young students have never had someone show up for them consistently, see them for who they are, and be committed to their growth.

In its 13 years, Macheo has won a couple of global awards, but Michael believes that the real “awards” are in the individuals who have been transformed through the program and are doing good in their own ways, languages, and places.

### **From Macheo to Mawio... and Mawio to Sulwe**

Macheo has inspired other projects in different places, for different groups. In 2024, Strathmore School began Mawio (“sunrise” or “dawn” in Swahili, a synonym for “macheo”) for students from challenging backgrounds in their Westlands sub-county. The Saturday program for junior school students is designed to improve the attendees’ academic performance and create a supportive community for their families.

And in 2025, Regis Runda Academy, 15 km northeast of Strathmore School, started Sulwe (“stars” in

Dholuo). A small group of Regis staff asked themselves the same questions the Strathmore University staff had asked and realised that their location gave them a clear answer.

“The school is perfectly located next to Githogoro slums,” Clifford Oluoch, principal of Regis, told us, “with almost 15 schools to impact, and a number of private and international schools that are capable of doing much.” They decided to connect the private and slums schools.

Once the program began, everyone got on board. Everyone wants to help, Clifford says, but they don’t know how to start. “The teachers [at Regis] are touched that someone is doing something... And the parents also feel that there is more the school can do.”

The community’s response allows them to offer the program cost-free, with teachers and students

volunteering their time and catering and transport fully provided.

## **Growing by giving**

Some of his best memories, Clifford says, are home visits to Regis students, where he has witnessed the gratitude of parents whose children are involved as volunteers in Sulwe.

And Michael agreed. In addition to trained teachers and lecturers, Macheo relies on university students who volunteer to tutor and mentor the high schoolers. He says that it is incredible to see how the program awakens their awareness and sense of responsibility, when they see that already, at 20 or 21, they have something valuable to offer the world and other people.

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*Individuals like Michael and Clifford from projects like Macheo, Mawio, and Sulwe will share insights, ideas, and experiences at the BeDoCare conference from 1 to 3 October 2025 at Strathmore University. Learn more about BeDoCare [here](#).*

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