

December 2006

Dear Friend,

Having known Jitegemee's founder, Farah Stockman, for over ten years, I have watched Jitegemee grow from an idea into an institution. This summer, when the opportunity to visit Kenya presented itself, I jumped at the chance to learn more about Kenya and Jitegemee.

When Farah first told me that Jitegemee served street children in Kenya, I didn't know what to expect. My first thoughts were of the destitute children that you often see on television commercials. However, the Jitegemee students all were clean, confident and seemingly well adjusted. They came to the Jitegemee center for lunch in their crisp, colorful school uniforms. They all came from dire circumstances and many had hard life stories, but they were not hopeless. Street children? These were normal kids. Sure, they were poor, but they displayed a resiliency and hopefulness that the future would be better. I really didn't understand why they were called "street kids."

I spent a few weeks in Machakos working with Farah, Program Director Mike Kimeu and teachers Alex Mutiso and Elizabeth Nzivo. The Kenyan staff works tirelessly to ensure that Jitegemee's students are prepared for elementary or secondary school, or are learning a trade in the vocational program. As a self-employed real estate entrepreneur in Washington, DC, I was drawn to the vocational program and wanted to help the students start viable businesses. I spent several days traveling around Machakos interviewing vocational students and the local artisans who were teaching them various trades.



*Keanne Henry (left) with one of Jitegemee's vocational scholars*

On my very last day in Machakos, as we were walking to the bus depot to leave, two boys approached Mike and Alex. They were dirty with uncombed hair and tattered clothes. Their eyes had a hazy redness from their sniffing of glue – the cheap drug of choice for street children. They stood in shoes with holes, begging money from shoppers exiting a nearby store. Alex and Mike spoke to the boys with an easy, casualness as I looked on. These were the first street kids that I saw during my trip to Machakos. "Those are street kids?" I asked Farah. "All of our kids were like that?"

During the visit, I saw the results of Jitegemee's work and heard the thankful reaction of the Machakos community. The program has grown tremendously over the years. In 2004, Jitegemee served 47 children. Now, the program provides a comprehensive support system for roughly 130 kids. That is 130 children in Machakos who are no longer on the streets. Simply put, Jitegemee has dramatically improved the lives of street children and the entire community of Machakos. One dressmaker who was training one of our vocational students told me, "there used to be so many [street kids] around town...now with the Jitegemee, there are very few." I knew then that I had to work with Jitegemee to help continue its mission of providing educational opportunities to the street children of Machakos.

This year, Jitegemee celebrated 10 years of serving the street children of Machakos. Several students in elementary school are at the top of their classes and are expected to be admitted to some of the top secondary schools in Machakos. Additionally, our first group of secondary school students graduated this year, and we must find ways to help these students navigate their way into colleges, universities or jobs.



*A Jitegemee-trained seamstress shows off her work*

In 2004, Jitegemee began a vocational training program for some of its older students, ages 14 to 22, who were too old to return to formal schools. The vocational program provides training and a year-long apprenticeship that often results in gainful employment for kids who were previously considered to be a nuisance. Twenty-five youths began their vocational training in 2004, and another twenty-five have started each year thereafter.

With proper training, the young men and women of Jitegemee will be able to find stable employment or start their own businesses. About 68 percent of those who have completed apprenticeships are earning money through their trades which allows them to help their families. The goal is to make the kids completely self-sustaining.

Jitegemee has been able reach more children each year because of the generous support of our wonderful donors. One of the reasons that I was compelled to support Jitegemee – and to join its board this year - is that the organization does

so much with so little. In 2006, Jitegemee provided its extensive services for 130 young people for less than \$50,000. This includes staff salaries, rent, school tuition, uniforms, apprenticeship fees, medical services, free lunch and more. Since Jitegemee is overseen by a small volunteer board in the U.S., the program's overhead is low, with less than \$1500 of the annual budget staying in the U.S. to pay for postage, printing, and other administrative needs.

Most Jitegemee board members have visited the program in Kenya, and Executive Director Farah Stockman travels there every year, but we always do so at our own expense.

I hope that you will join me in supporting Jitegemee. For me, Jitegemee offers a rare opportunity to support a program where I know that my entire gift is being used to save more than 130 real kids from lives of addiction and sure poverty. The children of Jitegemee are amazing survivors who, while still poor, are making great strides to improve their futures. I hope that you will help ensure their continued growth by contributing to Jitegemee.

Sincerely,

Keanne Henry  
Jitegemee Board Member