



jitegemee

\jee-tay-gay-may\ v [Kiswahili:sustain yourself]: empowering street children through education.

Letter from Jitegemee by Farah Stockman

Dear Friends of Jitegemee,

Years ago, when I was teaching street children in Kenya, a little girl came into my class who had a particularly troubled look about her. She had sticks and weeds in her hair, as if she had just come from sleeping on the ground. She had torn clothes on, an unruly smile, and an undoubtedly empty stomach. Something about her was wild and different from the other children in the class, who were also destitute, but well accustomed to the daily exercise of our informal classroom. I learned then that her name was Agnes, and that her mother had kicked her out of the house when she could not have been much older than nine or ten. I wasn't sure what would happen to her, since children who turned up

out of the blue at our center often disappeared just as suddenly. I remember someone saying that she was intending to work as a maid.



Agnes Kavita.

Years have passed and Jitegemee has continued to keep track of Agnes, who has grown into a

beautiful and bright student in school. This year, she writes in English about what happened to her, and I feel like I am hearing it for the first time.

The stories of these kids, and the chance to watch them grow up over the years and struggle against life's innumerable challenges, are one of the greatest gifts I have had in my life. No matter what struggles I face in my life - a tough boss, a stupid financial decision, a personal crisis - these kids have had to overcome far worse, and they have done it with dignity and grace.

This year, our program is continuing to grow, not just in numbers of children but in services provided. Eva Kivuva, a team member in Kenya, and Mike Kimeu, Jitegemee's Program Director in Kenya, *(Continued on page 2)*

Jitegemee Highlights by Njeri Gichohi

During most weekdays of the year, Kisilu and Mwema Maweu, brothers and Jitegemee scholars, sit in Kithangani Primary School in Machakos, Kenya where they learn a wide array of subjects including history, English, geography and civic

education. A few years ago, academic subjects and clean school uniforms were only a distant dream to Kisilu and Mwema. As street children in Machakos, Kenya, the brothers spent their days earning a livelihood for their families by collecting scrap metal from

the garbage. The pre-teenage boys would skillfully clean and flatten the metal, and use their street acquired entrepreneurial abilities to sell the metal for its salvage value. The little money that they earned from the sale of the *(Continued on page 3)*

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have begun a new phase of vocational training, in which children over 14 come to an informal classroom five days per week to prepare themselves to enter vocational apprenticeships in partnership with the Undugu Society, one of Kenya's oldest non-profit organizations.

Passing on some key responsibilities for the development of the program to the local community is a big theme of Jitegemee's progress this year. Mike has set up a local advisory board comprised of long-time friends of the organization in Machakos, including social workers and a doctor. This group will help us marshal resources for the program, better advocate for kids, and get our message out to a broader audience.



Jitegemee students take a field trip to

On this side of the ocean, Jitegemee has been overjoyed to get two new board members this year,

Njeri Gichohi, a law student at Suffolk University who has taken on the big job of fundraising czar, and Cathy Mosca, who has generously volunteered many, many hours making sure our system of contributions and receipts run smoothly. We are raising funds this year, in part, through a series of small dinner parties. Amelia Kaplan, a New York board member, just put on a great event, and David

Woods, a DC board member, has agreed to have one in the fall. (There is a list of events on the front page that we would like you to attend. Please contact us).

Many other developments are on the horizon: a better website, a new database tracking the progress of the kids and a big event in Boston planned for the fall. But we are keenly aware that, whatever successes we achieve here in the US, Jitegemee's real progress in bettering the lives of children is due to the hard work of our dedicated staff and partners on the ground in Kenya, and

“This year she writes in English about what happened to her, and I feel like I am hearing it for the first time.”

ultimately, the struggles of those children themselves. So I'd like to thank all those working on behalf of Jitegemee in Kenya, and I'd like to say: Excellent work, Agnes! **d**

New Home for Jitegemee *by Michelle Brooks*

Since October, Mike Kimeu, Jitegemee's Program Director in Machakos, Kenya, has arrived each morning for work at Jitegemee's first official Kenyan headquarters. The one-room office he rented is a hive of activity on the road from Machakos to Nairobi. In this small space, measuring just 12 feet by 17 feet, Mike administers all of Jitegemee's programs. He tracks the progress of our primary, secondary, and vocational students and meets with these students when they are not in class. He meets with the parents of sponsored children and receives visits from children who want to become



Jitegemee students take part in a team building exercise.

sponsored, as well as their parents. Mike and Eva Kivuva also use the office as a classroom for the business and life skills classes they developed to supplement our

vocational students' trade training. In a typical week, 50 people may pass through the office, making Mike's one-room cen-

ter of operations hectic and even cramped at times.

Now, Mike's busy agenda includes another project: looking for a new space to house Jitegemee's programs. His mission is to find a free-standing house close enough to town that street children will come regularly to take advantage of literacy classes and a feeding program. The ideal space will have at least one dedicated classroom large enough for a class of 25, a small library where students can come to read, and a kitchen that can support a feeding program for Jitegemee scholars. Despite this tall order, Mike is hopeful that Jitegemee will have a new home by the time you receive this newsletter.

To make this possible, Mike has enlisted the help of Jitegemee's supporters in Machakos. "I am actually working it out with the government and

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metal would go to feed Kisilu and Mwema's other brothers and sisters who are only a few years younger. Today, the brothers spend time with other boys their age in the local primary school learning how to read and write.

“We are very thankful for the tireless efforts of the sponsors of Jitegemee who assist the less fortunate street children,” says Mike Kimeu, program director of the Jitegemee Children's Program in Machakos. “The program is doing good for both the children and the community at large.”

The Primary School Program is the oldest and largest of Jitegemee's programs in Machakos, which include a Secondary School Program and a Vocational Training Program. Currently, thirty-four children are enrolled in primary schools in the area, where they are facing the new challenge of formal education. “It is wonderful to see the children



Street children in Machakos, Kenya search

walking to school in their new school uniforms and carrying their books in their bags every morning,” says Mike.

“No one can tell that they are rehabilitated street children. Their conduct has changed, as they are no longer addicted to glue. They are just as smart as the rest of the children. They have all the reason to smile for being sponsored by Jitegemee.”

In 2003, the resilience of the Jitegemee scholars was demonstrated by the children's willingness to overcome obstacles in order to obtain an education. Last year, Nduku Nganda, an eighth-grade student, was forced to temporarily drop out of school because of an unplanned pregnancy. This year, Nduku is back in school with her new eighth-grade friends. Every school morning, Nduku leaves her infant child with her mother to attend classes for eight hours a day. When she returns home in the evening, Nduku spends time feeding and playing with her child before she settles down to do her homework. Nduku successfully completes her homework every night even though she lives in a congested home and has to read her textbooks under candlelight.

In addition to counseling the children and helping them adjust to formal education, Mike has been working on developing and executing a new *Living Values* program. The program is geared to teaching Jitegemee scholars age appropriate sex education. The program commenced with teaching girls, ages

twelve and above, how to interact socially with boys, and how to prevent pregnancy. Mike says that, “the girls are learning how to responsibly relate with boys, and to focus on completing their studies before they consider marriage or motherhood. We are also working on integrating boys into the programs.” The *Living Values* program will help in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate, a major reason why young girls in Kenya drop out of formal education programs. Because of Mike's efforts, many young girls in Machakos are choosing to enroll in the tailoring and fashion design opportunity that Jitegemee's Vocational Training Program provides.

The fashion design opportunity is part of Jitegemee's Vocational Training Program which also includes training in carpentry, auto mechanics, and small business development skills. Several of our first vocational trainees are already supporting themselves. Mbithi Musyoka works as a successful welder in Machakos, and we recently hired Kyalo Kavindu, the first graduate

“No one can tell that they are rehabilitated street children. They are just as smart as the rest of the children.”

of carpentry, to make furniture for our new office in Machakos. After completing their training, the vocational students either start their own business and create employment opportunities for other residents, or become apprentices to other skilled artisans in the community.

Mike says that, “we definitely had some highlights and lowlights last year. I am glad to congratulate the candidates who sat for their high school entrance examination in 2003. Five of them joined provincial secondary schools. The gifts received from Jitegemee supporters have allowed these children to attend some of the most prestigious schools in Kenya.” **d**

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the municipal council. We have not identified a place yet, but I hope that soon we shall get one,” says Mike. The help of the local government is a good sign of Jitegemee's progress. Our current office is known throughout the town as a place where street children and their families can go for help, and leaders in the community would like for us to have the resources to help more people in more ways. Best of all, the benefits of working with local partners won't end with the house search. “If we get a house from the government, I believe we shall pay half the price of the office we already have.” explains Mike That's a savings that will go a long way to supporting our programs as they grow. **d**

volume 1 issue 1
June 2004

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\jee-tay-gay-may\ v [Kiswahili:sustain yourself]: empowering street children through **education**.

MY LIFE IN JITEGEMEE

I remember some years back when I was not in the Jitegemee program. My life was very strange because I was not going to school and I was very bad behaved. Now when the Jitegemee program was started I joined St. Mary's Girls Primary School.

But when at first I joined the school my mother told me that I had no right to go to school and I deserve to stay at home. I was very angry and noted into my heart that I would not step in the school not even a single day.

One day I said that I needed to learn and know how to read and write. So when my mother was asleep I escaped through the window and went to school. When I came back I found that my mother had moved from the house we had to another. I sat at the door and started crying.

When night came I went to look for a place to sleep, then my friend Njoki welcomed me into their house. I slept in their house and they took me back to school. They stayed with me for about two years and when I was in standard 6 the Jitegemee Program took over.

Now my mother had interest in me and took me and I went to live with her. I was very happy to see my family once again. Now in future I would like to go to a good secondary school and to be a musician.

I expect that my plans will succeed anyway. First I would like to thank the family that took me to school and secondly the Jitegemee Program very very much. I even went on many trips that I didn't expect to go, places like Nairobi and Naivasha.

May God bless the Jitegemee Program to help other children especially the children who don't have good plans for their lives.

I am very grateful for everything.

AGNES KAVITA