2017 — WHAT WE’VE BEEN UP TO

2017 started off with a bang - we welcomed 46 new students to our vocational class, hosted our first Jitegemee Open Day where we welcomed alumni and hundreds guests from the community, and added several new staff members to our team. Since then, we’ve kept up the positive momentum and have continued a strong 2017:

- 156 children and 132 parents received check-ups at our Annual Health Days in August
- 46 students from Vocation Class 13 completed their 6-month rehabilitation class and Trade-Choosing Workshop in October, and have been matched with community mentors
- Our parent empowerment program was formally registered as a self-help group with the Ministry of East African Community, Labour and Social Protection, and our parents are quickly becoming experts at beadworking
- A Monitoring and Evaluation intern, a masters degree student from Brandeis University, Lynn Armel, joined Jitegemee staff in September and will be with us for 6 months
From 2-9 September, a small group of visitors from the United States of America came to Jitegemee. This group included David Woods, a longtime friend of Jitegemee and former board member. Here’s David’s report from his visit to Kenya, Machakos, and Jitegemee:

I have known Farah Stockman since she was a baby – long before she founded Jitegemee. I was a colleague of her mother, Ida Stockman, at Howard University. I served on the board of Jitegemee more than ten years ago. At that time, I was unable to visit Machakos, so I was excited to learn of a new opportunity to do so when I visited Farah and Ida and heard of the plans for a trip to Machakos. I decided to join the trip, thinking that I was going as an observer of a program that I have supported. I was not prepared for the complete immersion in Jitegemee.

I was met at the airport by the new Director, Verity Norman-Tichawangana, and her husband Fungai. When we arrived at the colorful gate of the Jitegemee building, we were greeted by students singing and dancing. “Karibu!!” they cried and we felt the enthusiastic welcome! Soon we were shaking hands with everyone. I was not a quiet observer. I was a willing participant.

My visit was all about people. The leadership team planned activities that brought us into contact with students, staff, and parents. We helped make a meal of chapatis – a kind of bread that is cooked in a skillet - in the kitchen with the students. We traveled to Lake Naivasha and hiked with the students. We shared ideas and meals with the teaching staff, who were always available to guide and stimulate the students.

I had the chance to talk to the students about Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech, which had just been shown to the students in a video. The staff interpreted our American English into a more comprehensible Kikamba. Afterward, the staff encouraged the students to articulate their own dreams. Then we sat with the parents, where we learned to make saleable products out of beads. We all (students, staff, parents, and visitors) were immersed in the spirit of Jitegemee.

The Jitegemee leadership team has developed a vibrant school spirit with a growing sense of community. Students and staff are all part of the local Kamba community, yet there is growing awareness of the need for greater exposure to the world outside of Machakos. Our trip to Lake Naivasha extended the children’s experience. It is an ambitious goal to raise student awareness of the outside world, but an important one. I believe that good communication skills are vital to that awareness. Reading and travel expand horizons. Excellence in English will serve the students at home and abroad, when they have opportunities to travel.

On that trip, this observer became a member of the Jitegemee community. I was welcomed and immersed in the energy of Jitegemee.

Asante sana!

With love, David.

If you are interested in visiting Jitegemee, please email verity@jitegemee.org