We spent the first part of 2018 evaluating and celebrating Jitegemee’s success in 2017. We’re thrilled to share the results in our recently published 2017 Annual Report. They show that what we’re doing is working and having an impact on our students’ lives. Jitegemee graduates are becoming self-sustaining, and bringing our mission to life right before our eyes. A few of our favorite highlights include:

- 100% of our formal education students passed their exams – including 1 university graduate, 5 high school graduates, and 9 primary school graduates.
- 97.5% of vocational students passed the government trade test – our highest pass rate ever!
- We hosted Lynn Armel, a Master’s student at Brandeis University, for six months, and she conducted an impact study that showed:
  - 93% of our vocational program graduates are earning or employed
  - 61% of our alumni are paying school fees for a family member or friend
  - AND 43% of our graduates have trained or are training and mentoring a current Jitegemee student.

A NOTE FROM VERITY

A few weeks ago, I sat in a mud-walled hut in Mjini slum in Machakos, listening to Rose, the grandmother of a Jitegemee high school student, talk about the hardships she’s faced in trying to raise her grandchildren. This 5-foot grandmother makes about $1-$2 per day selling vegetables, which she carries on her back through the streets of Machakos. She barely earns enough to cover rent and food for her family. Five of her six children have passed away, including the mother of Ken, a student. Jitegemee has sponsored through high school.

It saddened me to hear the struggles that Rose and Ken have been through. But I felt incredibly inspired by how hard they both worked toward a brighter and more sustainable future.

Ken, a tall, gentle young man, will graduate at the end of 2018 and has an excellent track record of academic success. He wants to study and pursue a career in computer engineering, which will allow him to support his grandmother and younger brother. Ben. Jitegemee has “saved” him, he said. Now it’s his turn to save them.

I am so proud of our students and all they’ve achieved, and honored to lead our growing team that provides such vital support every day to these young people. A student like Ken might have given up hope for higher education after losing his mother in 2012. But our staff in Machakos helped him every step of the way, counseling him, tutoring him, and advocating for him, and finally purchasing the books, uniforms and other necessities that school requires.

Our staff don’t see their work as a job. They see it as a calling, and respond to the needs of students like Ken any time of day, nearly every day of the week.

Over the past year, we’ve worked hard to strengthen all the services we provide. We’ve expanded our feeding program to serve a healthy breakfast. We’ve expanded our curriculum to share with other programs like ours across Kenya.

We’re also thrilled to welcome Jennifer Katwa as our new Kenyan Country Director. Jennifer is a veteran educator who oversaw schools in Dadaab, one of the largest refugee camps in the world. She will assume responsibility for day-to-day operations in Machakos, allowing me to strengthen our systems in the United States and implement our strategic plan for Jitegemee’s long-term future.

The groundwork has been laid for some exciting new initiatives, including plans to open a “youth development hub” to provide students with job readiness skills, such as financial literacy and social media promotion. Our hub will also provide young entrepreneurs in Machakos a co-working space to access new skills and the Internet.

Right now, we’re in the middle of Kenya’s rainy season, which has been heavy and caused floods throughout the country. We know, though, that these rains bring life and a harvest to sustain the community helping the dry season. Likewise, we know the struggles we experience every day alongside families like Rose and Ken will one day bear fruit in the lives of our children.

We are deeply grateful for the support so generously given by the Jitegemee family around the world, and could not do this work without you. If you have enough to spare, please consider donating to help children like Ken fulfill their dreams of education and a dignified, self-sustaining life. We currently support around 200 students, and offer vital health care and nutrition services, including the mother of Ken, a student Jitegemee has sponsored through high school.

This year, we were excited to host Fullbright Specialist, Dr. Beverly Bell, a professor at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts. With input from the Kenyan Ministry of Education and our teachers, Dr. Bell is helping us formalize and develop our Rehabilitation Curriculum to share with other programs like ours across Kenya.

Let’s work together to continue to inspire hope, create opportunity, and serve the students we believe in to achieve their goals in life.

Thank you, asante sana!

Verity Norman-Tichawangana
Executive Director

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#JITEGEMEEDREAM WITH DENNIS MUTUKU

Dennis Mutuku dreams of taking away his mother’s burden. In 2017, he participated in a multimedia storytelling project with some of his fellow secondary students, sharing the struggles they currently experience, and their dreams for the future. Here is Dennis’s story, in his own words:

My name is Dennis Mutuku. I just started college this year against all odds. My Jitegemee Dream is to help my mother build a good house and to help my siblings achieve their goals in life.

I was brought up by a single mother who was physically disabled. We lived in the Mjini slum in Machakos Town, a family of five.

I was born in the year 1996. For as far back as I can remember, life has been hard for us. We’ve always lived in informal rental homes, and so many times my mother has been unable to pay the rent. She worked very hard to earn our daily bread.

Day to day, I face challenges such as a lack of confidence and the poverty at our home. My mother requires medical treatment for her leg, which she broke some time ago. She needs regular checkups and she cannot afford these. I am working so hard to ensure that this sort of thing will not happen to my family in future and to relieve my mum of her burden.

My mother’s greatest wish was for all her children to get an education. It hasn’t been easy to provide for five children, along with food, shelter and security. Not only could she not pay the rent sometimes, there have been times when we’ve had no food in the house.

One of my mother’s friends saw potential in me and told my mother about Jitegemee. My mother and I went to Jitegemee and she shared her story with the staff there. I was accepted as a Jitegemee student and my life changed for the better.

I have learnt a lot at Jitegemee. I have learnt about hard work, and we share meals and books. Jitegemee has provided a future for me and, by extension, my family. Jitegemee has opened up my eyes through field trips to different places in Kenya, like Lake Naivasha and Hell’s Gate National Park.

There have been career days where I have seen various options for careers to follow, and also talent shows where my friends and I have performed and had lots of fun. Two years ago, I graduated from high school, and now Jitegemee supports me with my college studies.

I find it amazing that a poor boy like me can get educated and gain access to all of these things. Thank you Jitegemee!

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Our 2018 fundraising goal is $260,000, and we need your help getting there. We’re looking to the Jitegemee family to help us reach our goal and welcome new friends and donors so we can continue supporting young people like Dennis. If you’re interested in volunteering at Jitegemee or contributing in another way, we’d love to hear from you at info@jitegemee.org.