

Letter from Jitegemee *by Michael Kimeu*

This year we witnessed the influx of many street children in the small Town of Machakos. In our effort to support street children who have shown dedication in changing their lives through learning and acquiring skills, we partnered with the Children's Department to analyse what could be the cause. The emerging picture contradicts the prevailing attitudes that stigmatize these children as deviants, criminals, and as socially aberrant. Although there is an array of reasons that affect whether an individual child leaves home or not for the streets, Jitegemee has seen a combination of economic pragmatism and flight from abusive and poor family situations as being primary motivators for children and youth to come to the streets.

In response to the above, this year the program moved one step ahead by enrolling 60 street children. We believe that this reflects the number of vulnerable children and youth; we are seeing more children and youth relying on the street environment for survival. Many have spent a significant part of their time in the street environment, and while honing their survival skills, they have missed out on education and development opportunities that would enable them to function more successfully within mainstream society.

We are now supporting 72 kids to acquire basic

education in primary school and 16 in secondary schools. In primary school we had eight students sit for national examination, and one of Jitegemee's scholars, Wambua Nzioka, emerged a top student in the district. Four others joined prestigious secondary schools: Faith Mwende -Machakos Girls', Kelvin Njoroge -Machakos Boys, Jacinta Mbwika-ABC Mitamboni Girls' and Alex Kyui - Kitonyini Secondary. The other three opted to join the vocational program. Over the April holiday we enrolled all the secondary kids to remedial classes in mathematics, science, and English. The response from the kids was very positive. "Given this kind of training it may not be simple to fail rather than passing in my exams," said

are glad to report no drop outs in primary school. Four of the secondary program graduates enrolled in college, with two, Mbithe Mutinda and Muli Kieti, attracted to Mass Communication/Journalism, and Lillian Syokau doing a Diploma in Agriculture. In the new year, we celebrated the first Jitegemee scholar, Muasya Peter, to score A-minus in Form Four examinations; he has enrolled in an Accounting program.

The vocational program has continuously produced good results. We graduated a group of 50 scholars in a colourful ceremony. Many of the students are now working, some on commission basis and others employed. "We have no



Jitegemee youth at a ceremony

Faith Mwende.

Even with the difficulties we have faced in the year we

words to thank our program and donors for the transformation of our children; I see the product of your good work

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portrayed by my son. He has a lot of self-esteem, he is now commanding respect in the society and above all he is helping pay school dues for his siblings" attests Mr. Musila, parent to Muthiani Musila, a graduate in welding. We have invited teachers as motivational speakers from other institutions doing skill training, like Undugu Society and Machakos Technical Training.

This year, Jitegemee staff had an exchange visit with Maji Mazuri organization in Nairobi, which was organized and sponsored by the Oswald Family Foundation. The aim of the ex-

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change was to share and learn from each other on how we run and manage the microfinance program. Jitegemee staff members were really impressed and challenged by the Maji Mazuri's successful microfinance program, especially in their way of training the beneficiaries on business skills, and their effective way of disbursing and recovering the loans. We also



Mike Kimeu with Bonnie and Andy Weiss

borrowed from their intensive monitoring ways and their efficient record keeping.

The workshop was really educational and we hope to implement many of the borrowed ideas in our program which is still young. Right now we have eight youth who have borrowed money from the micro-loan program and are repaying. The loans assist them in purchasing the tools and materials they require for their work. Another sixteen members of the current vocational class have started saving in preparation for accessing credit from the program.

This year the program enjoyed the services of a volunteer, Calum Bowden, who introduced basic computer classes for both primary and vocational classes. Andrew, Bonnie, and Annie Weiss are among the donors who visited the

program. We thank them so much for supporting the program. They can bear the program witness that street kids, given a chance, can do well in life and education.

We have had a long goal of acquiring our own office, vocational centre and library. We appreciate the support from Architects for Humanity for coming up with a plan of a new green education centre. We hope to receive our title deed very soon and immediately begin the construction. Your donation will go a long way towards making this centre a reality and serving more stigmatized youth to become self reliant and productive members of the society. **d**

Note from editor: The Commissioner of Lands has finally approved the transfer of our property.

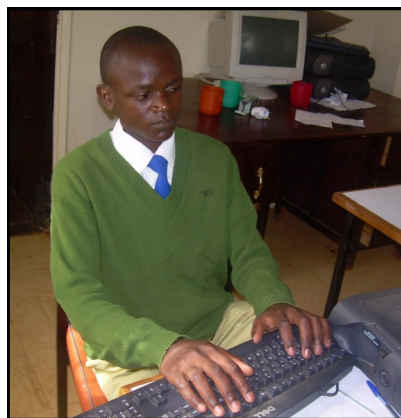
My life experience by Meshack Wambua Nzioka

My parents did their best to bring me up in their most affordable way. When I was in class three, things fell apart following the passing away of my dad. Life was unappealing to the poor family since the bread winner was not there and coincidentally my mother was jobless. To save the boat from sinking my mother started doing odd jobs such as washing clothes, digging other people's shambas, (farms) and other manual jobs.

At that time I wanted to give up learning due to the challenges I faced at school and back at home. I lacked sufficient diet, I wore tattered clothes, and at school I was mocked, isolated and discriminated by children from advantaged families. Many days I never went to school and instead I went to the streets to fend for myself. I thought I would end up being a watchman or a cart pusher.

Oh! I was in class seven at last - only one more step, then graduate to be the town cart pusher! I had now given up. Going to school having not taken any meal and dressed differently from the others was a big challenge. I saw God's great love when, after realizing my

potential towards success, our school head teacher gave a lot of support and the kids I worked with introduced me to Jitegemee program. The following day I was interviewed on various matters then I was sponsored. I was issued a new uniform.



Meshack Wambua Nzioka

This was my first time to wear a new uniform and new leather shoes. In addition to that stationery was provided while tuition fees were catered for. We were then all equal at school - no one belittles me. My self esteem and attitude towards life and myself changed positively. I vowed to work as hard as I could.

I started putting more efforts, "Why I crawl when you can walk, walk when you can run, run when you can fly?" Martin Luther King, Jr. Therefore when I did my KCPE exams I attained 411 out of the possible 500 marks and secured a chance at Alliance High School (the top school in the country). I am a true witness to other street children that with determination one can make it in life whatever background you come from. I have a dream of becoming a neurosurgeon. By attaining that I wish to join Jitegemee in their noble work of sponsoring street children. One thing which I realized is that street children require moral support more than any other person.

Finally, I would like to thank our donors, director, staff members and all people of good will for opening my eyes. Your support, financially, morally, spiritually etc is highly appreciated.

When the pathway seems long,
When temptation is strong,
When your strength is almost gone,
That's the time to press on.
Streets kids are able to make it in life. **d**

My volunteer experience by Calum Bowden

There is no way to envisage what life is like in rural Kenya and much of the developing world until you experience it firsthand. Coming from white, middle class America, no matter how many generalizations about Africa you've heard, there is no way to understand the overwhelming lack of opportunity that plagues places like Kenya. As I discovered, Jitegemee exists to provide opportunities for those who have the least of them. I spent four months volunteering in Kenya, just under three of which I spent completing Jitegemee's first internship program.

I lived with Norman and Francesca Mwanzia, an elderly husband and wife who adopted me as their American son and gave me the opportunity to fully experience Kenyan life and Kikamba culture. They took me to church with them, to their family farm, and they introduced me to their family, friends and neighbors. Norman and Francesca have spent their lives creating their own compound complete with a house, corn fields, two small houses for rent, a preschool class room and a mango tree. Every morning I would walk 30 minutes from where the Mwanzias lived in Miwani to Jitegemee's center in Machakos Town, or if I was running late, I would take a matatu (a shared taxi). To get to the main road, I would pass through Miwani, greeting and being greeted with "Jambo!" at every smiling face. "MZUNGU!" (foreigner) the little kids exploded at the sight of me, a strange, slightly red American man strolling through their rural community.

I hope that the risk Jitegemee took in sending a fresh, qualification-less high school graduate to Kenya paid off. In an environment that could not be more different from my suburban home town of Brookline, Massachusetts, my age gave me a common ground with many of the Jitegemee scholars; it gave me an initial way to connect with them.

I worked in collaboration with Mike, Elizabeth, Mwelu, and Alex to find the areas where I could be of most use. My duties included developing a basic com-

puter skills curriculum and lessons, and creating a networked computer lab and a litter management and environmental awareness program. While I hope that my work there will have a lasting impact in Machakos, I know that what I learned from Jitegemee's students and staff will forever impact the way I approach life.



Calum Bowden with Jitegemee students



Calum's computer class in session

Through conversations with courageous people, I saw just how invaluable faith and optimism are in surmounting dire situations. The first day I arrived at Jitegemee, I was introduced to three girls who wanted to tell me about what they had been through. The girls, whom I later got to know well, recounted horror

stories about life on the streets, drug and alcohol abuse, and not having enough food to eat. They were two years younger than me and already they had been through an incredible amount of hardship. I thought about people I know from home who, in spite of the privileges they have, chose not to do their homework, who chose to go to class high or skip class altogether. How come when opportunities and necessities are provided, people abuse them? Every Jitegemee student I met craved education. Learning is their key to a better life.

One of the girls, exuding the confidence and maturity of a person much older than fifteen, continued her story. She wore a long, floral-patterned skirt and a simple button-shirt, carefully scrubbed cleaner than anything I owned, and she appeared cool and at ease under the hot sun. She was ready to open up her heart to a complete stranger and share her love for Jitegemee. She spoke softly and thoughtfully in English, a language she had only learned up to the Kenyan sixth grade level. She explained to me how one day, instead of being ignored and looked down on by passersby, she was approached by a well-dressed teacher from Jitegemee. She was offered a daily meal and the chance to learn a trade and do something with her life. This was an opportunity she seized with her entire spirit, and she is now a certified hair dresser and was one of the best students in my computer classes.

While it is not always this easy to get children off of the streets, Jitegemee is extremely successful and has a high retention rate because there is so much need for what they do; most street children just need to be given the chance to succeed. The students are so grateful for Jitegemee and I was touched by the weeks of effort they put in to welcome a family of donors with dance and songs. I will always be grateful for the opportunity Jitegemee gave me and I am already planning my trip back to Machakos. I will forever remember the stories, songs, dances, expressions, jokes, and smiles. I hope to continue being a part of the Jitegemee family and the great work that they do. Tutaonana. **d**



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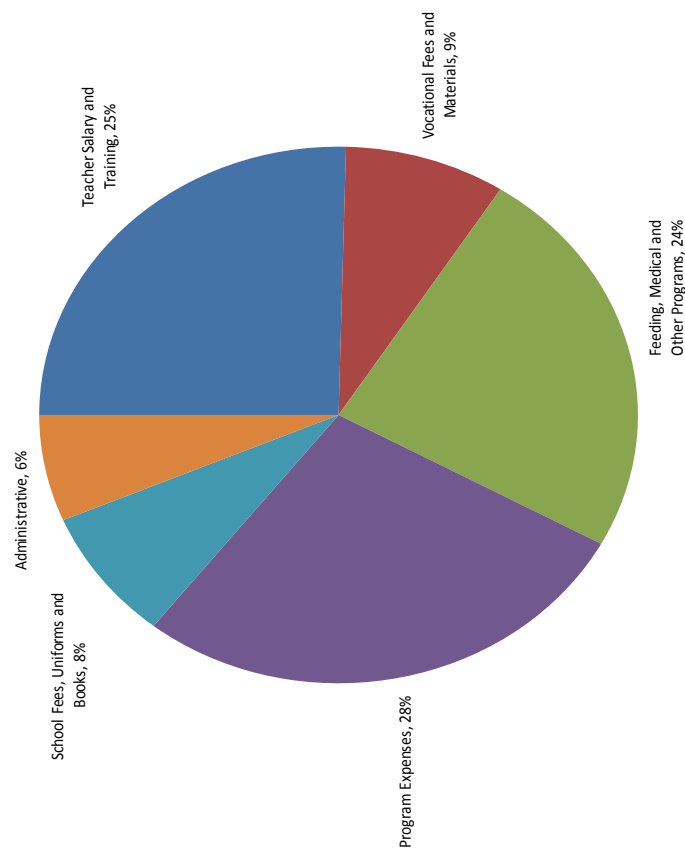
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Jitegemee Program Expenses 2010



Total 2010 Expenses: \$68,969.01
Total 2011 Budget: \$83,000.00

2010 in Numbers:

Total Number of Children Served: 169

Number of children sponsored to elementary schools: 47

Number of youth sponsored to high school and college: 22

Number of youth sponsored to vocational training: 100