

SUCCESS FOR FELICITAS – JITEGEMEE VOCATIONAL GRADUATE

Meet Felicitas. She's the third born in a family of six. She was raised by a single mum in Mjini slum outside Machakos. She dropped out of school at the end of primary school and started doing odd jobs – cleaning clothes, running errands – so she could buy food or clothes.

“My friends, girls I grew up with, were street children. They would sniff glue, sleep on the streets, because they didn't have homes or had run away from home. Some ran away because they were hungry, some because they were sexually abused by family members or neighbours. They found it hard to stay at home so they went to the streets to find food.

“I went to school up to the end of primary school. Although primary schooling is free in Kenya, the school would still require KSh300 (around US\$3) per school term, which was a struggle for my mum, and often we would get sent home because we couldn't afford that amount. We'd be able to pay 50 bob (US0.50) at a time until we'd paid off what we owed to the school.

“We'd go to school with empty stomachs. Other kids at school would come from wealthier families – they would be fed and come to school with snacks. We would envy those children. It was hard to focus and work when we were so hungry, but we knew we had to work hard to get out of the kind of life we were in.”

After dropping out of school and being a domestic worker for two years, Felicitas found out about Jitegemee and asked for a place in the vocational training program.

“I spent 6 months in the rehabilitation program, where I learned many things: I learned about people skills, how to do public speaking, how to relate with people. After those six months we were told to pick a trade we would be interested in. I picked hairdressing. I had never done hairdressing before, but I naturally liked beauty so I thought it would be a good choice.”

It was indeed a good choice for Felicitas. She spent one year with her hair-dressing mentor, Anne. After graduating from Jitegemee, she quickly found a job at a salon in Machakos.

“On my first day on the job I earned 83 shillings (around US\$0.83)! I thought, wow, I never thought I'd earn so much money in my life! I thought, if I can earn 83 shillings on my first day, that means if I work harder I can get more clients, and I will earn even more cash.”

From that salon, Felicitas joined the most successful salon in Machakos, where she worked for five years. After that, she partnered with three colleagues to open their own salon – Diva's Parlour. This went well for more than a year, until Felicitas went on maternity leave and she had a falling out with her partners. Instead of seeing this as a major setback, Felicitas saw an opportunity for personal growth. With her baby girl at only 4-months old, Felicitas opened the doors of her own salon – G-Creations – and is now running her own successful business.

“I thank God for Jitegemee. Since I went there, I have had no regrets. Because of them I found my mum a real home, where she is doing farming and doesn't have to pay rent. I provide for my three younger siblings and pay for their secondary school fees.

“Jitegemee gave me life. Jitegemee gave me a chance to be a good person; to be who I am today.”