

jitegemee

\jee-teh-geh-máy\ v [Swahili : sustain yourself] : empowering street children through **education**.

December 2010

Dear Friends of Jitegemee,

I have been a board member for nearly ten years, but the chance to travel to Kenya to spend some time with the staff and students of our program is still a rare treat for me.

This July, I spent an exhilarating week with them.

I met our newest teachers for the first time and found them as dedicated as I had been told. I spoke at length with each member of the staff, and saw in greater depth what our vocational students are learning and how our lunch program is impacting the lives of students. I also saw the lovely piece of land that will be our future home. All of us at Jitegemee – students, teachers and American volunteers - are greatly looking forward to having a building better suited to the program's needs, and much more space.

The staff, the students and the community are hoping that our new center will include this city's first public library. To help with our efforts to plan, I visited libraries across Kenya with our staff, and talked to several librarians about how to create a library that can serve Machakos well and meet our students' growing and diverse needs. Our teachers have begun thinking broadly about how to make it a true community institution, with input and donations from business leaders and ordinary people in Machakos.

After each visit, I come home humbled by the extraordinary work our staff manages to do on limited resources. Do you know that Jitegemee has a retention rate near 100%? Anyone who works with such vulnerable children will find that amazing.

This great success comes from the fact that our staff takes the time to know each child well, to understand the family situation and the challenges the child has faced in school, and to help each child develop confidence that he or she can become a contributing member of society.

On my first classroom visit, the children were eager to recite in unison the poem they had written about themselves:

REFORMED

*They laughed at us
When we roamed the streets
They scorned us
When we overturned the dustbins
They spat at us
When we passed near them with tattered
clothes
And stinking bodies*

*They sneered at us
When we lay on the streets
In the cold nights
And heavy rains
They stared at us
When we sniffed glue
They never took notice
When we begged for food*

*But today
We design their clothes
We build their mansions
We dress their hair
We drive and repair their cars
We fix their appliances
We make their furniture*

*They no longer despise us
For we no longer stink
We no longer beg
We no longer sniff
We no longer starve
Our donors have seen us
We are reformed and refined.*

We are deeply grateful for this support. For those of you who have not donated this year, we hope you will consider writing us a check to help us keep this program going. While we have been delighted by the success of our fundraising efforts for our future building, it has meant that we have to stretch more than usual to raise what we need to pay our teachers, buy food for our lunch program, and pay for school supplies and other program costs. Please help us meet our operating expenses for 2011, as generously as you have helped us in the past.

Thank you all for your support for this work!

Cordially,

Helena Halperin

Helena Halperin
Board Chair