

Jitegemee Community Library Program

Jitegemee, which means “Sustain Yourself” in Kiswahili, is a grassroots nonprofit that provides formal and vocational education to street children and destitute youth in Machakos, Kenya. We serve about 200 youth a year.

Jitegemee exists to provide street children with access to formal and vocational education. We believe every child with the desire to learn and the will to succeed should be encouraged to do so. We are dedicated to removing the obstacles that prevent street children from attaining their educational or vocational goals—whether these obstacles are hunger, homelessness or lack of schooling.

For the past several years, Jitegemee has been building a new educational center which will include library that will be accessible to the whole community for an affordable membership fee. Libraries are important because many children in Machakos do not have adequate places in their homes to study. Books are scarce and reading for pleasure is almost unheard of among the poor. In addition, many students lack the reference materials necessary to prepare for high-stakes exams that determine their future. Lastly, for youth in our vocational program, who spend their days at work, the library can be a place to continue their education.

According to a survey we conducted of 70 Machakos town residents (ages 10-50) in March 2014, the residents desire to increase the amount of time they spend reading but are limited mainly to books that they can purchase, or borrow from their friends. The children served by our organization lack the resources and finances to purchase their own book. Thus, it is clear that an alternative source of books is needed for this community.

We are looking for partners to help transform our empty space into a library, to fund youth-led activities which promote library membership and to offer training resources for the library volunteers who will help establish and support the running of the library.

In terms of written materials, our overall 2014 goal is to equip our community library with 10,000 books that are interesting and relevant to Machakos Residents. African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Tom Wambugu and Waithaka Waihenya were requested by the respondents. However, we see our platform as one that will increase the children’s exposure to upcoming African writers, their interest in diverse topics of study as well as providing resources and creating the reading culture they need to succeed.

For more information or to get involved please visit our website: www.jitegemee.org and reach out to Peggy Mativo on pmativo@jitegemee.org