

# PORTRAITS OF **PROMISE**



# Healing Through Harambee

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*Staff Writer*

Bricks. Wheelbarrows. Hard hats. Hot days. A group of teenagers and some compassionate adults who love them well. It's not glamorous or dramatic, but Orphan's Promise partner project Harambee in St. Louis, Missouri, is bringing hope and healing to the community one teenager, one home, at a time. Aaron is living proof.

**These are the stories.  
These are the souls.  
These are the portraits of the  
lives we're changing.**









## **Aaron grew up in St. Louis in a single-parent home after his dad was violently killed.**

The loss of his dad impacted their family deeply, but they are close to each other and do their best. Aaron loves his mom and his three sisters and brother deeply. He's a humble, gentle teenager with a big heart and soft smile. But life in St. Louis isn't easy, and programs like Orphan's Promise partner project Harambee help give at-risk urban youth like Aaron a safe environment to grow and learn in.

Harambee is a special place for teens—a **place where they can learn life skills and serve their community under the mentorship and supervision of adults who are invested in helping them reach their full potential.** It offers parents a safe, stable place to send their kids. And with after-school programs during the school year and an eight-week summer program, Harambee helps families like Aaron's all year around. In fact, Harambee is meeting the needs of both the youth and the community.

**PROGRAMS LIKE ORPHAN'S PROMISE PARTNER PROJECT  
HARAMBEE HELP GIVE AT-RISK URBAN YOUTH LIKE AARON A SAFE  
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St. Louis is primarily a brick city, and brick homes require maintenance over the years. In lower-income areas, it's hard for homeowners to find affordable options to get tuckpointing done—the process of fixing or replacing the mortar between bricks. Harambee helps pair these homeowners with teens doing volunteer work through the program, teaching the young people valuable construction skills—such as how to do these kinds of repairs.

Jeffrey Clay, the executive director for Harambee's youth training programs, shared the heart behind their approach: "It provides our youth who are looking for positive things to do ... the opportunity to earn a stipend as well as serve in the community by repairing the homes of many of our low-income homeowners who are probably widowed and can't afford to have tuckpointing done."

The teenagers do the volunteer work on homes for free but earn an education stipend by attending life skills classes. Harambee helps equip them to be adults by giving them skills



in conflict resolution, building and managing a budget, choosing college classes, and understanding the foundations of healthy relationships. They also learn what it means to work hard and take a lot of pride in the homes they help repair. It's also a program built on faith, and Jeffrey says, **“We want our kids to know what is it to love Jesus and serve Jesus Christ.”** The adults come alongside each youth and invest in them, mentor them, and show them the love of Jesus. The stability and safety these relationships provide is critical to the healthy development and growth of the teens in the program—teens like Aaron.



**HARAMBEE STARTED IN 1996. THIS SWAHILI  
WORD MEANS “LET’S PULL TOGETHER!”**



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Aaron started coming to Harambee when he was 12 years old. He faithfully showed up every day in the sweltering St. Louis heat to help tuck-point homes for elderly, low-income families. A few months before he came to Harambee, he was diagnosed with a form of cancer. One morning that summer, he woke up with severe pain in the left side of his head and was rushed to the hospital, where he immediately underwent surgery to remove a tumor. The surgery was successful and soon Aaron started showing back up at Harambee to continue working alongside his friends and helping his neighbors. Now, he's 16 and healthy and still active in his community. He loves





playing sports and, in his free time, enjoys playing video games.

**“Today I’m grateful for being alive to share my story,” he says. “I’m also grateful for God being with me through the whole thing.”**

Aaron dreams of some day owning his own company as a general contractor or developer. He hopes to expand his skills and get training in plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work. With help from the Harambee team, he is well on his way to learning the technical skills, life skills, and relationship skills he needs to achieve his dreams.



# “ THIS IS ABOUT YOUR HEART AND SOUL

Lester Badenoch, Harambee’s director of safety and training, shared how often urban communities point to teenagers and kids as the problem in the neighborhood. But when Harambee comes into a community and the adults witness a team of young people volunteering their time and energy to fix their homes, the landscape starts to change. Healing happens. Hope grows. Long-term relationships blossom, and both the youth and adults get to learn from each other. Watching that transformation take place over a semester, or a summer, is life-changing.





“We tell the kids, this is about your heart and soul,” he says. “We really want to see you grow up to be godly men and women.” Lester is deeply invested in these kids and their futures.

Aaron and many other at-risk youth in the program could have had a very different story. Having a community of adults—wonderful mentors like Lester and Jeffrey—come alongside him and care about his future makes all the difference. Orphan’s Promise partner programs like Harambee provide safe places for kids to build community, learn valuable life skills, and find ways to make a positive impact in their community. Hope and healing come one teenager, one home, one community at a time. Thank you for partnering with Orphan’s Promise and making that possible.





give us a call: 1-800-818-4016

**orphanspromise.org**

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