

Threads of Hope - A new Micro-enterprise Arises

Like the phoenix, a new beginning emerges for some of the people in La Entrada. Undeterred by language barriers, the web of regulations and travails of importing manufactured goods from a foreign country, Abbie Pennington shares her passion for teaching and sewing with local women, who will shortly embark upon a novel path that will ultimately lead to the production of high quality boutique fabric items for sale in the US.



Recognizing the need for job creation for women to support themselves and their families, Abbie is attempting to link up local personal needs and domestic skill sets with the disposable income of US women looking to purchase unique, yet practical high-end gift items. As the recipient of an enterprise development grant, Abbie is in the midst of setting up a communal sewing operation that produces high quality fabric products from designer cloth. These items are by no means products from your typical sewing factory or “sweat shop in a less developed part of the world!”



The product line envisioned consists of more than a dozen products, but the line is expected to launch its first two pieces – a “quillow,” designed as a folding quilt that can be turned into a pillow, and designer bedroom pillow case sets by spring of next year. These two pieces will be used to test production capabilities, marketability through hospital and nursing home gift shops and customer acceptability.

The conditions under which these gifts are produced reflect Christian principles and an extraordinary set of working circumstances. Products are produced in an environment of shared values reflective of belief in personal gifts from the Almighty, hope for the workers and the futures of their children and families. Hence the name Threads of Hope was selected for the project and for the label of the product line. Profits from the sales of the merchandise will help support the Manos Amigas Clinic in La Entrada, which serves the medical needs of the community. An eye-catching hang tag, attached to each item produced, will tell the Threads of Hope and Manos Amigas stories.

Pods, childcare, standards and earning potential

The production process is unique in that workers set their own pace and work intensity. Child care is provided on-site and the women set the wages for which they are willing to work. Basically the manufacturing unit is a group of three to four women, referred to as a pod, working under “one roof” in a home, community center or other building as sewers on machines purchased through a micro-loan or other arrangement. Workers are encouraged to bring their infants or young children to work. Each of the sewers, for one-week periods throughout the year, will take turns providing day care service in the building for children in their pod while the other workers continue to sew.

Manufacturing quality standards will be set for each product. Only products meeting the highest quality standard will be accepted. Workers will be trained and they are paid by the piece for each piece meeting the quality standard. Earning potential is determined by the pace set by themselves and the skill level attained. As individual women become more proficient and personal earnings increase, they may wish to break off and start their own pod in another barrio. As customer product acceptability and profits increase, there will be opportunities for year-end bonuses and additional micro-loans.

This project is intended to reduce anxiety and stress, engender a degree of self sufficiency, encourage self confidence and generate a level of financial security. The ability to earn money leads to greater purchasing power for things like food, increasing protein content in the diet, access to medications and hope. With hope, they can expect that tomorrow brings another day in which they earn their place in society and provide the opportunity for their children to break out of the circle of poverty.

Enterprise development and the possibility of micro-loans are new avenues of exploration for SATC, but the benefits of job creation, support for families and the elevation of women in the community are well recognized.



A new dress and shoulder bag