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Quick Update Overview-

Over the past few months there has been quite a bit of change with the women's group and associated micro enterprise. As most of you already know, in the non-profit world it's not only about trial and error, but also about evolving along with the community it serves.

Recent Programming:

Of the three new programs I mentioned in my last report, the DIY program has begun to dissipate with declining interest and availability during the high season. Nonetheless, the baking and Zumba/health groups are going great! The Zumba ladies have even ordered matching tank tops to wear when they meet! I anticipate that the excitement for these two groups will continue and become lasting programs for the Mujeres Activas de Potrero.

Sewing Group/ The Shop Re-org:

As I mentioned, the sewing group has been shifting in dynamic over the last few months. With the high season, many women are finding employment, which is occupying the time that they would have spent sewing. That being said, six months from now, there will likely be less positions available from their current employer, and they will once again be in need of income opportunities. With the limited resources of a small non-profit like Abriendo Mentes, we cannot dedicate the time, money, and space needed to run this program if it will only function a portion of the year. At the same time, we would like to facilitate the continuation of opportunity in the low season. Given the circumstances, we are floating around different ideas to dissolve the official program yet preserve the potential for income generation.

One of the foremost ideas is to offer some of our sewing machines for purchase at a discounted price and with a payment plan. We would do a similar system with the fabrics, thread, needles, etc. This way the women will have access to a machine, with the flexibility to sew when they have time, and we will be able to use that space/ money to invest in further programming. Some might suggest we give the machines for free, but in offering it at a manageable price, the women are taking ownership and earning what they

are receiving. It has been proven that handouts for things like this diminish the value observed in the product.

When these women do have more time and need for income, we will treat them as we do other vendors- they simply bring in their goods, we price it together, and they receive 70% of their product sales at the end of each month. I will suggest that they take a look at the standard product mix previously developed to get an idea of what is popular among tourists, and will make patterns/ measurements available as well. Nonetheless, they have complete autonomy on what they sew, how they choose to design it, and when they take the time to do so.

As you can see, without the steady inflow of sewn goods from our group, we are becoming a more vendor centric operation. I have been actively reaching out to female artisans in the surrounding communities to incorporate more locals and make a larger financial impact, while appealing to more customers with a wider array of products for sale.

For individuals who come in with small needs such as clothing alterations and other cloth repairs, we will contract out to the women who were previously a part of the sewing group. Those who are most readily available will get the job.

Fundraisers:

Our big discount card fundraiser kicked off on Wednesday, January 13th, and we have had a great response! In just three days we have sold over 20 cards, and have been contacted by many more with interest. Between word of mouth, Facebook posts (how most people communicate around here), and local events, we have a goal of 200 cards sold. That means \$2,000 in fundraising for the current women's programs and social enterprise, as well as capital to jumpstart new initiatives mentioned below.

As you can see, MAP thrives on adaptation as well as the audacity to try new things, and from time to time, admit defeat. After putting so much time and energy into developing something, it is difficult to let go, but in the last few months have learned to do so.

Now that we have determined the end of this large portion of MAP, it is time to start anew and approach the community with other opportunities that may be a better fit for economic opportunity. The next program I expect to pilot is in food sales. Apart from the "Sodas," which are generally only open through lunch, there is not much local food readily available for purchase. The idea is to market "local food made by local women"

and accept orders for things such as gallo pinto, arroz con pollo, empanadas, etc. It would function similarly to the custom ordered sewing where we would act as a liaison between the customer and producer. Of course there are many kinks to be worked out, not to mention gauging interest in the community, but I see this as a relatively low risk investment. With direct food orders, we will have little upfront capital needs (just buying dry ingredients in advance) and promise of reimbursement with each delivery made. We will see where this operation is in three months when I turn everything over to my successor.

End of a Journey:

Unfortunately my time with Abriendo Mentes will be coming to an end in early April. I am sad to leave, but hopeful that over the next three months I will be able to get the women's programming and social enterprise to a point where it is ready to grow even further as it is handed off to the next volunteer.