

# Southwest Creations Collaborative

# 30-Year Impact Report

October 2024



## Catalyzing the Cycle of Generational Wealth

Since 1994 Southwest Creations has advanced dignified employment and educational opportunities for our community, driven by an equity-centered focus on supporting thriving families.

# Celebrating 30 Years of Changing Lives

Southwest Creations Collaborative began with a handcrafting workshop at San José Parish in 1994. Susan Matteucci had a vision for empowering low-income women.

She studied poverty alleviation models in developing nations and had developed microlending programs in Chicago, based on the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. She engaged Sister Bernice Garcia, who knew that women in her Albuquerque parish needed to earn their own money.



Moving equipment into San José parish hall

Sister Bernice got the word out and the workshop drew 75 women, a surprisingly large attendance. More than half of the women kept meeting biweekly at San José's parish hall, forming a sewing group that filled contracts for Marketplace: Handwork of India (led by Pushpika Freitas). They made items like women's shirts and home interior goods.

By 1996, Southwest Creations needed its own space,

moving to a nearby prefabricated building and hiring the women as employees. Southwest Creations stayed true to values of women earning an income and investing it in their children. From Day 1, employees had on-site childcare for \$0.25/hour.

Responding to barriers faced by Spanish-speaking immigrant employees, Southwest Creations introduced adult education in 1998 including English as a second language, citizenship, and GED studies. The organization's reputation as a good place to work spread. Wages were livable, work was full-time and consistent, childcare was offered, and employees were treated with respect and with investment in their growth.

In 2001, Southwest Creations began contract manufacturing for Clariant (Belen, NM), which would become its largest client and spur a 2005 move to a 4<sup>th</sup> Street warehouse that was able to house growing manufacturing, daycare, and programs.



West Elm Zero-Waste Production Team

**Investing in sustainable wellbeing is a pathway to wealth.**

In 2008 the work area was expanded by another 2,400 square feet to produce mosaic tile art designed by Erin Adams.

In 2010 those tiles were featured in mosaics at Chicago's Belmont L Station. Southwest Creations was also featured on PBS' Frontline World and Hand/Eye Magazine; the idea of social enterprises was spreading.

In 2011 Southwest Creations launched Hacia, a pre-K-12 college-readiness program that quickly grew to serve families across the South Valley.

With business booming and community connections deepening, Southwest Creations and Partnership for Community Action developed a bigger vision around shared values and shared space. In 2022 that vision became a reality with the opening of the South Valley Social Enterprise Center.

*The long-term success of Southwest Creations proves a sustainable business can be driven by a social vision.*

# 30 Years of Impact

*Building opportunity across generations since 1994.*

Southwest Creations Collaborative is a **women-driven social enterprise in Albuquerque, New Mexico**, that provides contract manufacturing for sewn soft goods and hand-crafted products. We have a social mission to alleviate poverty and build economic and educational **opportunity across generations**.

**REAL  
QUALITY.  
REAL  
IMPACT.**

We've provided  
**DIGNIFIED,  
LIVING WAGE  
JOBS** to more than

 **250**  
WOMEN (and  
two men)

We've paid over

**\$19**  **million**

in production  
employee  
**WAGES**, investing  
in the local  
economy

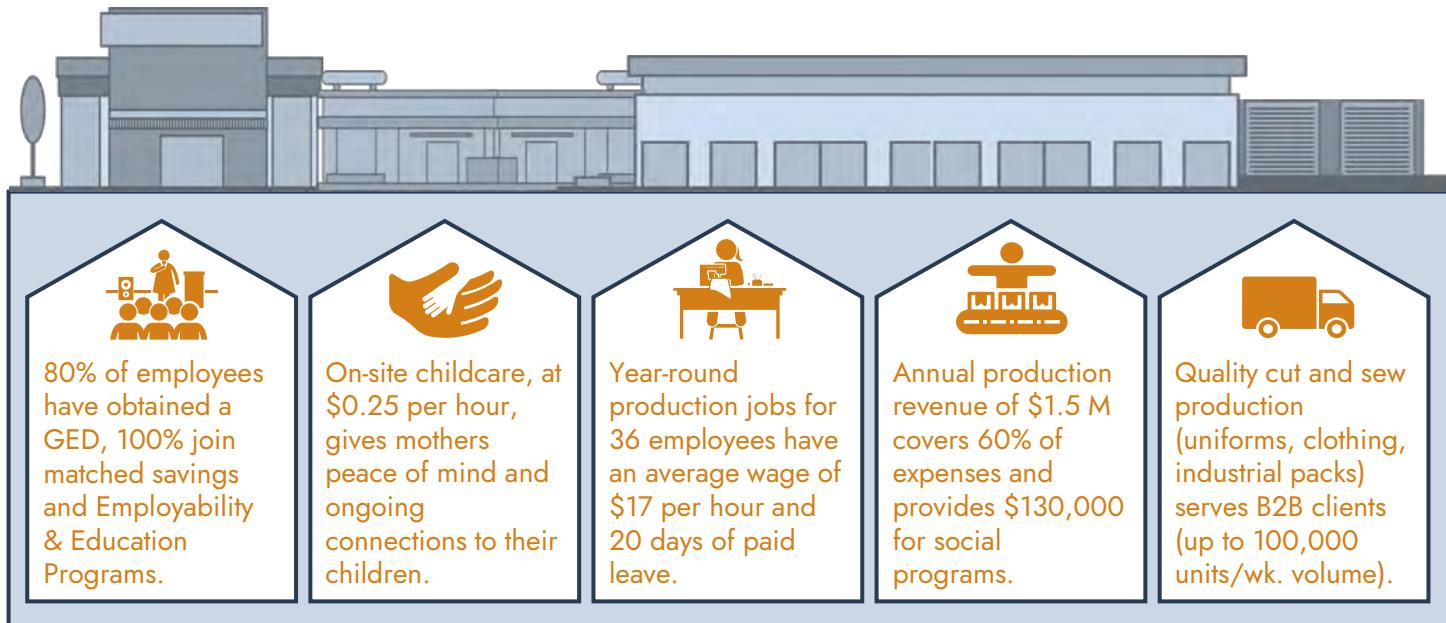
We've **LOCALLY  
MADE** industrial  
products, home  
goods, and  
apparel for

**175**   
contract **CLIENTS**

We have always  
provided on-site  
**CHILDCARE**, for  
\$0.25/hour,  
serving

**350**   
**CHILDREN OF  
EMPLOYEES**

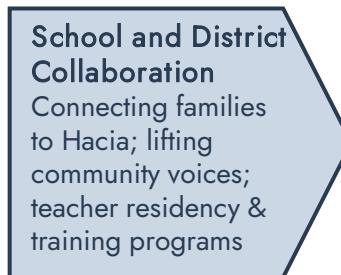
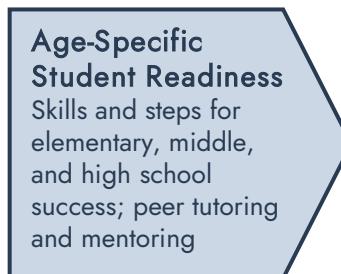
Southwest Creations is more than a place to work, and our employee are more than just their labor. Over 30 years we have demonstrated that a **sustainable business can be driven by a social vision** that delivers living-wage jobs with affordable onsite childcare, investment in employee training and development, and pathways to support generational wealth and social change.



**Give a woman a chance to earn an income and she will invest in her children.** Give clients quality products on time and on budget and contracts will grow, providing revenue to invest in employees, their families, and the community. This extends our reach through social programs like Hacia: Toward the University, a family engagement program helping Hispanic and Latino students graduate high school and go to college.



ENGAGEMENT   COMMITMENT   MOMENTUM   PLANNING   NAVIGATION   TRANSITION



**Southwest Creations Collaborative** is a women-driven social enterprise with a mission to alleviate poverty and build economic and educational opportunity across generations.

**87%**   
of Hacia parents **ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE** in their child's **SCHOOL**

Led by a **team of first-generation, bilingual college graduates**, Hacia uses proven strategies in family engagement. Approaches are based on best practices and the experiences of Southwest Creations' employees and their children.

Through a teacher residency program and trainings, Hacia **shares methods for engaging students and families**, tools for effective communication, and planning for success. Hacia's Success Plan tool creates a triangle of support with educators, family, and employees to ensure that the child will thrive.

The **goal is higher education (college) and employment for the entire family**.



**714** Hacia families

**16** partner schools

**153** senior participants

**98%**  
of Hacia seniors **GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL**

**97%**  
of Hacia seniors **ACCEPTED TO COLLEGE**

**95%**  
of Hacia seniors **ATTENDING COLLEGE**

## BENEFICIARIES

**16,331**   
students, parents, and educators **SERVED** by Hacia

**82%**   
of families live in Albuquerque's **SOUTH VALLEY**

**93%**   
are **FIRST-GENERATION** college students

**97%**   
of students receive **FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEALS**

# REAL IMPACT.

## ► Meaningful Change

Creating multigenerational prosperity and well-being goes beyond dependable, living-wage work. Southwest Creations offers on- and off-site opportunities for employees to improve English, prepare for the GED, and build skills in facilitation, leadership, tutoring, and program oversight.



## A Conversation with Karen Perez, Hacia Project Manager

Karen Perez was a senior in high school when a teacher handed her and her mother a flyer reading: "Do you want your student to go to college?" This was how she learned about Hacia—a program she now directs. They attended workshops, used tools, and leaned on Hacia for one-to-one mentoring.

The content was clear: "It was simple in a way that got you thinking in a whole different level about where you see yourself in the future." Hacia empowered her mother, turning hope to action: "I really saw her growing as a person and growing as a leader, which I needed."

# A Business that Works for Families

## ► Multigenerational Approach

Multigenerational family engagement is woven through the organization, starting with on-site childcare. While parents work, they know their children are safe and nearby; they can eat lunch together and check in throughout the day.

## ► Hacia K-12 Program

Southwest Creations started a college-preparedness program in 2011 as a response to barriers employees face—*especially those who did not attend U.S. schools*—navigating their children's education.

Hacia has grown to support hundreds of families each year, partnering with 16 schools and providing teacher professional development.

Hacia's core is family engagement and empowerment. In workshops, families learn about grade-specific steps leading to college enrollment. Parents develop skills in talking to children about school and their dreams and learn to think critically about their progress.

Individual goals are captured and tracked in Success Plans with ongoing one-to-one meetings from Hacia employees, who are first-generation college graduates themselves.



*"As a first-generation student, you hear 'I want you to do better than I did,' but there's not a conversation of what that really looks like...so a lot of our kids get lost."*

Karen was the first in her family to attend college. She returned to Southwest Creations as an Hacia intern while earning her degree in education. Karen quickly rose in roles and saw the power of family engagement and mindset in student success—factors not mentioned in her training in teaching.

Karen realized her greatest impact would be with Hacia and its community-based solutions: "The ladies from our production area, we use their experiences, their struggles, the things that work in their kids' schools."



# REAL QUALITY.

# A Business that Works for Clients



## ► Partnering with Clients to Create Sustainability

Over 30 years revenue from Southwest Creations' production contracts has grown from \$30,000 to \$1.5 million per year, sustaining the business and providing funding for social programs. That success means providing value, quality, and dependability to clients.

## ► Manufacturing Capabilities

Production serves clients nationwide, specializing in high-quality soft sewn goods. Capabilities include cut and sew, knitting, filling and sealing, assembly, and packaging.

## ► Growing with Clients

Southwest Creations has flexible capabilities, allowing co-development of new products. Combined with a robust Quality Management System, this allows successful manufacturing of a range of products.

Southwest Creations makes home goods and pet products, high-end and children's apparel, rugged uniforms, and industrial products. When COVID-19 hit and supply chains choked, employees quickly started making PPE for frontline workers.



## ► Client Reflections: Clariant

Southwest Creations provides sewing for Clariant's line of cargo desiccants, which protect 500,000 metric tons of exported agricultural products annually. Excess material is then used for a line of "industrial chic" goods, like the totes shown.

Justin Mueller, Clariant Vice President, Absorbents, Americas, reflects:

*Clariant is proud of its 20-year association with the social enterprise. We are Southwest Creations' largest customer, generating more than \$1,000,000 in annual revenue. We value immensely our long-term partnership with an enterprise that delivers such high-quality work while at the same time contributing to empowering low-income communities.*

*"Southwest Creations has been a blueprint for what I've done with Kei and Molly Textiles."*



## A Conversation with Kei Tsuzuki, Co-Founder of Kei & Molly Textiles

Entrepreneur Kei Tsuzuki joined Southwest Creations 25 years ago, helping to develop fabric printing and buyer markets. She launched her own business, Kei & Molly Textiles, based on similar ideals and approaches. Her Albuquerque company has 12-15 employees, who are mostly immigrant and refugee women. Their colorful hand-printed textiles are now in more than 400 stores and 42 states.

"We are motivated by what we can do for the people who work for us, and that is a very different way of looking at business. It's very much values-based."

As Kei explains, paychecks "open the door for better health for the whole family, more educational opportunities for the kids, and improvement for the women." Her employees have help studying for the American citizenship test and accessing supports like legal aid, plus paid time off for parent-teacher school conferences and winter holidays.

"I don't think our legacy will be the designs that we do. The legacy we leave behind in our community is every person who has worked for us, who has touched us in some way, has in their mind a model of how to do business differently."



# Sharing Vision for Community: The South Valley Social Enterprise Center

In June of 2022 Southwest Creations and partners (see right) moved into a 14,000 square foot purpose-built facility: the South Valley Enterprise Center (SEC).

SEC is a social hub for community and a center for economic development, bringing well-paying jobs, professional development workshops, entrepreneurship resources, and parenting and leadership training.

At SEC, Southwest Creations has expanded manufacturing capacity and capabilities and has a new childcare center and space for Hacia to reach more families.

Construction was partially funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, which recently recognized SEC with the prestigious Star of the Southwest Award for its demonstrated economic impact.

## SEC Facility Features

- Community engagement and training center
- Dual-language early childhood center
- Playground
- Production and manufacturing floor
- Loading dock and Electronic Data Interchange shipping
- Offices for 3 agencies

### ► Partnership for Community Action

Partnership for Community Action (PCA) invests in local residents, helping them become strong community leaders and advocates for access to quality education, health equity, and economic opportunity for all. PCA and partners deliver a childcare business development accelerator, parenting skills programming, and microlending.

### ► Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors

This national nonprofit supports parents as family leaders and as their child's first teacher. Facilitators and partners in 400+ cities to bring a 10-session curriculum to parents of young children. Parents learn to build strong foundations for their children in reading, math, technology, health, and more.

## A Conversation with Flor Lopez, Program Director

Flor Lopez was 27 with two young children when a friend asked her to cover shifts at Southwest Creations' daycare. She wanted to stay on but didn't know how to sew — "Oh, you can learn" assured Executive Director Susan Matteucci. With prior manufacturing supervisory experience and a degree in finance earned in Mexico, she soon rose in responsibility to now directs all Southwest Creations program efforts.

Flor's three daughters have graduated college; "Southwest Creations gave me the opportunity to invest my time—quality time, in them."

Flor mentors employees, runs workshops, and supports five employee committees. Her first message to hires is: "You are here for some reason. This is a gift for you and your family. I hope you take it. And I hope tomorrow you'll love this place the same way that I love it."

Flor cultivates employee self-esteem, self-knowledge, and empowerment. She encourages employees to achieve their own American Dream and see community in their work: "This place is your place. It's our second home... our decisions that we make are through you, through every single committee."

*"Nobody wants to leave. As soon as you know this place, and as soon as you start loving this place, you don't want to leave."*





## Southwest Creations has grown alongside its many clients.

3form | Utah  
Abl | New Mexico  
Amarantha | New Mexico  
Autumn Teneyl | Colorado  
Blue Thistle Design | New Mexico  
Bon Marché | New Mexico  
Canvas | New York  
Cintas | New Mexico  
Clariant | New Mexico, International  
Cucuyo | California  
Designers Guild | UK  
Dorsey Helman | New Mexico  
Erin Adams Designs | New Mexico  
Floating World | New Mexico  
Heritage Hotels & Resorts | New Mexico  
Jonathan Adler | New York  
Kiwi Industries | New Mexico  
Le Roar | New York  
Magic Cabin Dolls | Virginia  
Martin & Barnett | California

Maude Andrade Designs | New Mexico  
máXimo | New Mexico  
Mimi Green | New Mexico  
Museum of New Mexico Foundation  
Maya Romanoff | Illinois  
Navajo Spirit Southwestern Wear | New Mexico  
Sachi Organics | New Mexico  
Sense Clothing | New Mexico  
Snug Organics | Colorado  
Snippets | Florida  
Susan Neal Designs | New Mexico  
Susan Todd Designs | New Mexico  
Takach Press | New Mexico  
Tewa Tees | New Mexico  
The Fabric Merchant | New Mexico  
Walmart.com  
West Elm | New York  
Woollyhoodwinks | California  
NMYAFL Cheerleading | New Mexico

**Thank you to all the past board members and founders who have helped build Southwest Creations' legacy over 30 years:**

We are very grateful to our many funders and individual donors over the years. Thank you!

Special thanks for the ongoing partnership of:  
• W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
• City of Albuquerque  
• Bernalillo County  
• Albuquerque Community Foundation

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### Southwest Creations Founders

Isabelle Barreras  
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*To the whole Southwest Creations team, none of this is possible without you. Thank you!*