

An Alpaca Spinning Association in the Town of Nuñoa

Two years ago we helped a group of elderly women and some disabled people form a spinning association. This seemed an important contribution in that it assisted a marginalized group in town, used local resources, and had the potential to grow thereby influencing the formation of other such groups. Members consist of 15-18 persons who are carrying on the textile tradition of the district, and have few other means of employment. By spinning fine quality yarn they are creating value products rather than selling off raw materials to middlemen at low prices. In essence, local producers using a long handed down tradition spin local alpaca fiber (Nuñoa's primary export) and sell this to a local knitting group called Manos Magicos and other outlets in the region.

Over two years ago we helped this nascent group, the **Asociacion de Artesanias de Hilados Tuhui Pacocha de Personas con Discapacidad** after they presented us with a plan. With a \$5000 grant they were able to rent a work place and buy washing, carting and spinning equipment. In addition they hired technicians who advised them on production techniques and quality control. The director, a school teacher, has worked without pay organizing the group and overseeing its operation. Last year we provided them with an additional \$2500 to continue the rent, officially register the association so they could participate in fairs, and travel funds to seek out markets to expand their outlets.

To this end we also explored the US market where profits would be considerably higher. One of our members is an importer of Peruvian woven goods and was willing to use her services free of charge to get the Nuñoa goods to this country. She ordered 200 hats and just last week they arrived at her facility in Maine in good condition and of "good quality." She, in turn, will distribute these to stores and we are searching out additional outlets.

Last month two representatives of the Nuñoa project met with members of the Association to evaluate its progress and future plans. Their assessment was quite positive in that regional orders had increased significantly. Most impressive, however, were testimonies from the weavers that the Association provided an important workplace to meet. It offered social support to one another and produced greater sense of self esteem. As one member said: "Nobody remembers disabled people. In our meeting space we converse and if someone wants something, we share." Another mentioned: "We didn't have anything. Now we have some income. Not much, but it is something." And finally: "It is help for us. We were discriminated against. Here we have some income for our households."

While this seems to be a success story, we are very much in the initial phases and the Association will need more financial support and advice before it is to become a self-sustaining micro-business. One priority is to increase the wages of the spinners so they have a greater incentive to stay on the job. Another is to diversify their

production to fit the needs of the buyers while taking advantage of various skills of the spinners.

We hope you can support this effort, and their need and enthusiasm.