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# Stitched Past

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# STITCHED PAST

A Capstone Experience Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Bachelor of Arts

with Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Sawyer M. Smith

May 2017

\*\*\*\*\*

Western Kentucky University

2017

CE/T Committee:

Professor Tim Broekema, Advisor

Professor James Kenney

Dr. Melinda Grimsley-Smith

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## ABSTRACT

“Stitched Past” tells the stories of vulnerable women in Lima, Peru. Despite the emotional and physical impacts of poverty, the women seek mentorship, education, and job security through Krochet Kids International. Krochet Kids, a U.S.-based non-profit organization, offers women in Peru and Uganda the opportunity to create knitwear to be sold online. In addition to gaining a new job and skill, the women receive counseling, affordable childcare, and supportive community.

Krochet Kids approaches empowerment from a holistic perspective. The mentors encourage growth in five categories: financial, intellectual, physical, social, and psychological. This model of personal development ensures that the women sustain a healthy lifestyle after graduation from the three year program.

Each program participant graduates with a savings account and business plan in order to pursue a financial goal of hers. This goal-oriented strategy changes the women’s perception of poverty. One of Krochet Kids’ greatest challenges lies in helping the women believe that they can better their own situations. With newfound confidence, the women often see changes in their emotional stability and decision-making abilities as well.

Keywords: Capstone, Peru, Photojournalism, Women, Empowerment, Non-Profit

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help of many organizations and individuals. I am thankful to Krochet Kids International for allowing me to reside in Lima, Peru and document the women in their program. My role as Photojournalism Assistant was an unforgettable experience. Working with Krochet Kids taught me as much about life as it did about photojournalism and the clothing industry. Most importantly, I want to thank the participating women for the success of this project. Their willingness to tell their stories is crucial to the journalistic process. I am thankful for their constant friendships as well.

My time in Peru would not have been possible without funding from Western Kentucky University. My gratitude towards the Honors College at WKU is inexpressible. I received the Honors Travel Abroad Grant, Honors Development Grant, and CE/T Excellence Award as a result of their generosity. Furthermore, I received a FUSE grant from the Office of Research and the Office of Study Abroad and Global Learning's WorldTopper Scholarship.

I would like to thank the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at WKU as well. The George Tames scholarship covered final project expenses. Within the Photojournalism department, I have my professors to thank for constant support and advice. My first and second readers, Tim Broekema and James Kenney, worked hard to help this project succeed. I truly appreciate their willingness to walk through each step of the process: from ideation and proposals in spring 2016 to the final product one year later.

Lastly, I would like to thank specific individuals who gave their time and energy to this endeavor. The project editor, Kendall Norwood, pieced together and enhanced the final multimedia package. WKU Professor Amanda Crawford and writer Hunter Folsom edited the written story multiple times. Dr. Grimsley-Smith, the third reader in my defense, offered helpful suggestions for clarity. Krochet Kids employees Patricia Nammany and Jordan Zigler offered several Skype interviews. Finally, my friends and family played an incredibly significant role in supporting me before, during, and after my venture to Peru. Their encouragement and discernment guided me at many points in the journey to finishing this project.

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Krochet Kids International | Lima, Peru

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Photo and Video Intern (June 2015 - August 2015)

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Photo and Video Intern (June 2014 - January 2015)

Conscious Magazine | New York City, New York

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Newspaper Photo Intern (June 2013 - August 2013)



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Stitched Past” evolved from an idea completely unlike the final product. I anticipated featuring travelers in a short documentary. Instead I created a multimedia package about an impoverished community of women. The latter results in not only more thought-provoking and meaningful stories but also more eye-opening experiences for me as a journalist.

Before traveling to Peru, I had never witnessed a community like Chorrillos, Lima. The neighborhood is quaint and colorful, yet clearly developing. Reminded constantly of my appearance as a minority, I was not accepted at first. The language barrier was only one factor in the differences between locals and myself. With time and routine, however, I found it easier to navigate the city and gain trust with Peruvians. The experience of carrying out daily life and facing everyday challenges in Peru taught me invaluable lessons about life, relationships, and culture. Reflecting on this project, the greatest takeaway of the past year is the wisdom that came with living abroad. Gathering media content came second to conducting investing in the community and making the most of the living situation.

Each instance that led me into a woman's home also afforded me a learning experience. My knowledge of Spanish was extremely limited upon my arrival, but I quickly learned the commands for "stand up," "sit down," and "smile." Conducting family portrait shoots in a foreign language meant relying heavily on non-verbal communication and the subjects' comfort in front of the camera.

I pursue photojournalism not only as a reason to create beautiful photos. To me, it is an outlet which allows me to know individuals deeply in order to share their perspectives. Had I not traveled to Peru and interacted personally with each subject, I could not have gained these perspectives myself.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROCESS

Before my time in Peru, I had a vision of the project in mind. These ideas gave me structure while planning shoots and pitching project ideas to Krochet Kids. I anticipated creating an 8-10 minute short documentary, featuring interviews with ladies from the organization. The final product is similar to what I had in mind, although it includes a written feature story, infographics, and photo story as well.

Collecting the content over five months in Lima, Peru was the most challenging, yet exciting, portion of the project. It pushed me to explore places outside of my comfort zone and initiate unexpected conversations. I was constantly inspired by the strong women that I encountered and the depth of their stories.

Next, I edited the video content, photographs, and notes into a complete package. As the video was the basis of the initial project, I took primary consideration for this portion. I translated interviews with the Peruvian women and cut them into a short documentary with supporting footage of the Krochet Kids worksite. I toned and captioned portraits of the ladies for a photo gallery as well. Through a learning process of trial-and-error, I created infographics to convey statistics about the women's growth and success.

Lastly, I worked with an editor, Kendall Norwood, to finalize the project as a whole. She offered helpful advice and guidance on the flow of information and structure of the content. She also made necessary changes to the infographics and encouraged me to choose more relevant photographs.

Each step in the process drastically changed the project as a whole. From the initial stages, it transformed into something different than I imagined. This process inspired my passion for multimedia and interactive web projects, and I hope to pursue similar ideas for causes or campaigns in the future.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHALLENGES

While I faced many challenges throughout the duration of this project, I consider each of them worthwhile, as they resulted in valuable lessons.

As with many photojournalism projects that I have conducted in the past, access to the subjects' homes presented an issue. I was able to visit five program participant's homes, but these visits were restricted under the mentors' supervision and tight time constraints. The photographs that I captured are almost entirely posed family portraits. I hoped to shoot some natural photos of daily life as well. Footage showing the struggles that the women face in poverty could have added validity and visual interest to the video. Additionally, it would have helped the viewer empathize more with each interview subject.

Life in Peru presented challenges of its own. I expected the language barrier and cultural differences. These can create uncomfortable situations, but those become less frequent with exposure to the country and its people. The women of Krochet Kids do not speak English, so I learned quickly to interact with tone and body language; my Spanish language improved exponentially throughout my time there as well.

The greatest struggles occurred within the community of Krochet Kids interns. Living and working together in a remote location made it difficult to create a sense of personal space. This issue ultimately resulted in rising tension between interns. Personal conflicts regarding lifestyle were common amongst the American co-workers. This unhealthy community left the interns feeling trapped, and the community of interns collapsed before its expected end date in December.

Lastly, about three months into my five-month abroad experience, all of my camera gear was stolen. It was a discouraging experience that left me feeling unmotivated and defeated. After a period of rest from shooting photos and video, I regained my confidence to collect more content from my mobile device. The final project is comprised of about 25% iPhone content. At times I find it difficult to even discern myself which photos I shot on the phone. This challenge in particular pushed me to become a better photographer, utilize more strategic light sources, and think more intentionally about how I shoot. After collecting some images, it became easier to view this challenge as a creative hurdle instead of a major setback.

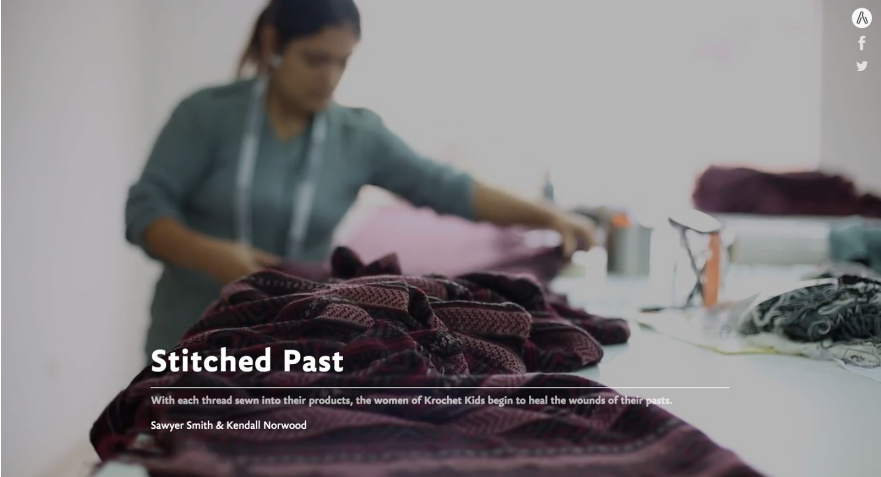


## CHAPTER 4

### MULTIMEDIA PACKAGE

Below are images representing the “Stitched Past” multimedia presentation. The full project package is viewable at the following link:

[https://sawyersmith.atavist.com/stitched\\_past](https://sawyersmith.atavist.com/stitched_past)



## Stitched Past

With each thread sewn into their products, the women of Krochet Kids begin to heal the wounds of their pasts.  
Sawyer Smith & Kendall Norwood



**P**overty and vulnerability stifle the women of Krochet Kids International. They live in an impoverished district on the outskirts of Lima, a city in the developing country of Peru. Socially constructed and strictly enforced gender roles suppress many of these women from reaching their full potential. Furthermore, a single woman in her twenties is rare when motherhood is expected by age eighteen.

The mental and emotional impacts of poverty leave most women in similar situations disillusioned. Their physical needs are demanding, but their emotional stability is in even greater danger. The overwhelming need for change is paralyzing.

Krochet Kids International, an organization dedicated to empowering women, gives those in Northern Uganda and Peru the opportunity for change. The organization offers education, mentorship, and jobs to women willing to accept honesty from the counselors and long hours sewing in a regulated work environment. Each beneficiary works as an independent contractor, paid per product that she creates. Additionally, Krochet Kids offers affordable childcare, which allows the women less restriction on the hours they can work.



## The Women of Lima

It is 4:30 A.M., and the ladies of Krochet Kids Peru are already preparing lunch. Having cooked *lomo saltado* on the sizzling stovetop, they awaken their children in the dark for a long day ahead.

The sun rises behind thick, gray clouds as young mothers send their children off to school. Shortly after, they file into their workspaces. They each exchange a quick “*buenos dias*” over the collective noises of their knitting machines, which create the sound of loud washboards across the seven buildings of their worksite.

As the day wears on, the knitting room grows hotter. Creating hats, bags, and clothing items is tedious and frustrating at times. The women knit quickly, but they produce perfection.

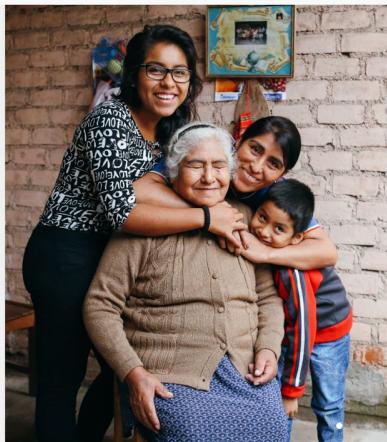
**lomo saltado:** /'lomo sal.ta.do/

1. a traditional Peruvian dish, a stir fry that typically combines marinated strips of sirloin with onions, tomatoes, and french fries; and is typically served with rice.

**buenos dias:** /bwe.naws th.ee.ahs/

1. good morning; good day

View the gallery below to learn more about the women impacted.



**Eva Alvarez 38-year-old of Lima, Peru** | To Alvarez, family means everything. She fosters a special connection with her mother and children, because of her past experience with tragedy. After her father passed away, Alvarez became depressed and struggled to work. While she was able to sell vegetables at the market, she still could not provide enough for her family. She jumped from job-to-job in search of work in the apparel industry.



Beneficiaries create hats, scarves, gloves, and other clothing items using knitting machines, which help produce patterns and shapes with impeccable consistency.

The financial stability of a job is only one factor in overall mental wellness and empowerment. Helping women realize their potential is the first hurdle that the women overcome. Convincing vulnerable women to join the program and face that hurdle presents an initial struggle.



The ladies must accept a mentality of hard work. The mentors consider earning money and respect more valuable for the beneficiaries than the finances that they acquire.

“Sometimes women think they’re coming in for a handout, but they get responsibility instead.” Jordan Zigler, 25-year-old Krochet Kids Peru Quality Control Manager of Knoxville, Tennessee, said. “Lima’s poverty has become generational and cyclical. We have to teach patience so that the ladies push past the learning curve of the job.”

**“We want everyone to know that they deserve a hot shower, and we want to show them how they can get it.” -Patricia Namanny**

Additionally, many Peruvians believe that women should stay home and leave work to their husbands. This mindset perpetuates a cycle of unhealthy relationships for some, and leads many to fear that they will be unable to provide for their children.



The residences of Pacifico overlook the Pacific Ocean's coast. Families consider these beaches their backyards and visit this location in search of food or clothing items.



## District of Chorillos



Ask any taxi driver in Lima to take you to Villa Nicolasa, the neighborhood where Krochet Kids and many of its beneficiaries reside, and you will likely receive a perplexed look from the driver and nothing more than that. Most locals in Lima avoid the area entirely; they have been taught to fear it.

A map will prove no more useful, because the unnamed streets have no addresses. All roads leading to Krochet Kids are dirt. Just within the city limits, the district is simultaneously urban, yet remote.



View the gallery below to learn more about the Pacifico area.





Vilma Bautista Huaman, Krochet Kids employee from Lima, Peru, steams knitted panels before they are sewn together.

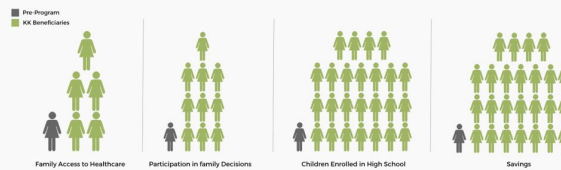
## The Theory of Change

"What excites you?"

**M**entors at Krochet Kids seek to answer this question about the women early in their program experience. Setting goals, large or small, establish the foundation for progress in the women's lives.

"They don't always reach for the things that they want," Namanny said. "Some of them say that they don't need running water, but they always want something. It depends on what they find truly valuable."

### Measures of Empowerment



connections humans experience across cultural and socio-economic boundaries.

"If we say these ladies are 'emotionally impoverished,' what does that mean?" Zigler said. "We all know what it means to be happy, sad, and angry. We relate regardless of upbringing, background, and skin color."

Financial	Intellectual	Physical
Employment Rate	Personal education level	Instances of illness
Value of household assets	Preschool attendance rate	Access to routine healthcare
Access to credit	No. of children supported in school	No. of meals per day
Bank account use	Literacy level	Access to clean water
Home ownership	National Language fluency	Access to sanitary toilets
No. of family members per bed	Primary school attendance rate	Healthcare costs
Krochet Kids Intl income	Secondary school attendance rate	Severity of illness
Income earned outside the program	Vocational school attendance rate	No. of work days missed due to illness
Ability to meet consumption needs	University school attendance rate	Access to emergency healthcare
Net worth		Nutritional value of meals
Value of loans taken		Distance to water source
Land ownership		
Quality of house		

Swipe to view the 45 measured growth indicators in each of the five categories.



Debora Nunez, program participant in the Cut & Sew department, creates a product at her sewing station.

**Figures 4.1-4.14 Multimedia Frames**, Source: Smith, Sawyer. "Stitched Past". Apr. 2017. Web. May 2017.



## CHAPTER 5

### PHOTO STORIES





**Figures 5.1 & 5.2 Eva Alvarez 38-year-old of Lima, Peru** | To Alvarez, family means everything. She fosters a special connection with her mother and children, because of her past experience with tragedy. After her father passed away, Alvarez became depressed and struggled to work. While she was able to sell vegetables at the market, she still could not provide enough for her family. She jumped from job-to-job in search of work in the apparel industry.

Soon after, her significant other passed away as well. After facing this loss, she struggled to believe that she could love another person, so she devoted herself to raising her children.

Krochet Kids encouraged her to pursue motherhood while focusing on her own goals too. In 2015, Alvarez got engaged to another man. Since then, she has also declared her dream of owning her own clothing business and graduated the Krochet Kids program. Between sewing products and running a clothing shop out of her home, she saved enough to initiate her own business plan.

Because family plays a significant role in Alvarez's life, she considers their dreams her own.

"Another dream of mine is for my children to attend university and be able to live an independent life," Alvarez said. "Sabrina, my oldest, wants to be an accountant. I'm saving my income to help her pay for school."



**Figures 5.3 & 5.4 Beatriz Tucta, 27-year-old of Ayacucho, Peru** | Confidence to try new activities and fierce independence are newly evident in Tucta's persona. Previously unemployed and untrusting, she has transformed into a role model for other women in the community. While she initially had trouble maintaining healthy relationships with her family members, she is making consistent progress in her personal and social life.



**Figures 5.5 & 5.6 Beatriz Tucta, 27-year-old of Ayacucho, Peru** | One of the program's first participants to purchase hot water and move from the impoverished neighborhood of Pacifico, Tucta recently graduated from Krochet Kids with a large savings. Her newfound sense of self-assurance has encouraged her to start a business of her own.





**Figures 5.7 & 5.8 Leonor Melendez, 28-year-old of Ayacucho, Peru** | Born in the Andean Highlands to a family of farmers, Melendez has faced financial difficulties since childhood. At 14-years-old, she moved to Lima in hopes of obtaining high school education in a large city. She sacrificed living with her family in favor of the opportunities that higher education would bring, but school fees were too high and forced her drop out again.

Melendez worked various odd jobs with long hours. She accepted any job available, although most were unstable. These included serving at a Chinese restaurant, selling bread on the street, and labeling cleaning supply bottles in a factory.



**Figure 5.9 Leonor Melendez, 28-year-old of Ayacucho, Peru** | Simultaneously, Melendez faced obstacles in her relationships, which led her to believe that people are fundamentally untrustworthy. Zigler recounted that her first months at Krochet Kids presented challenges.

“She kept getting warnings from Krochet Kids because she was being mean. She had trouble opening up to people and taking constructive criticism,” Jordan Zigler, Krochet Kids Peru Quality Control Manager, said. “She has softened, grown, and become an entirely different person. It’s so encouraging to see that level of potential in someone.”

Melendez spoke firsthand of the same changes she has experienced recently.

“Before I came here I was a very distrustful and vengeful person,” Melendez said. “Today I can see that I have changed a lot. I have learned to take things calmly.”





**Figures 5.10 & 5.11 Rosmery Shupingahua, 24-year-old of San Martin, Peru** | Having grown up in a sparsely populated area of Peru near the Amazon rainforest, Shuingahua's education did not exceed the third grade. Her father asserted that she was not smart enough to further her education, so as a child she resorted to working instead. Throughout her life, other family members dictated that she was not attractive, capable, or worthy. She faced emotional abuse from her close relationships, including her husband.

When Shupingahua arrived at Krochet Kids, her education lagged behind, despite having built a life and family for herself. She could not locate Lima on a map of Peru or write her own signature.





**Figure 5.12 Rosmery Shupingahua, 24-year-old of San Martin, Peru |** Shupingahua now represents one of Krochet Kids Peru’s most improved ladies. She employed her ability to survive and adapt in learning to knit. She has since moved into a greater role, ensuring that the product line runs smoothly. She aspires to buy land in the forest one day. In the meantime, she wants to see her daughters obtain an education and grow into successful women.

“I will do anything to give them the best life possible. I am here to care for them and protect them no matter what,” Shupingahua said.



**Figure 5.13 Sabrina Garayar, 25-year-old of Junin, Peru** | When Garayar was young, her parents worked hard, but earned little. They both logged hours in factories, yet the family remained impoverished. Sabrina dropped out of school after seventh grade in order to work to earn supplementary family income. Since then, Garayar has worked various jobs to sustain herself and three children. Abuse from close relationships added stress to her situation.





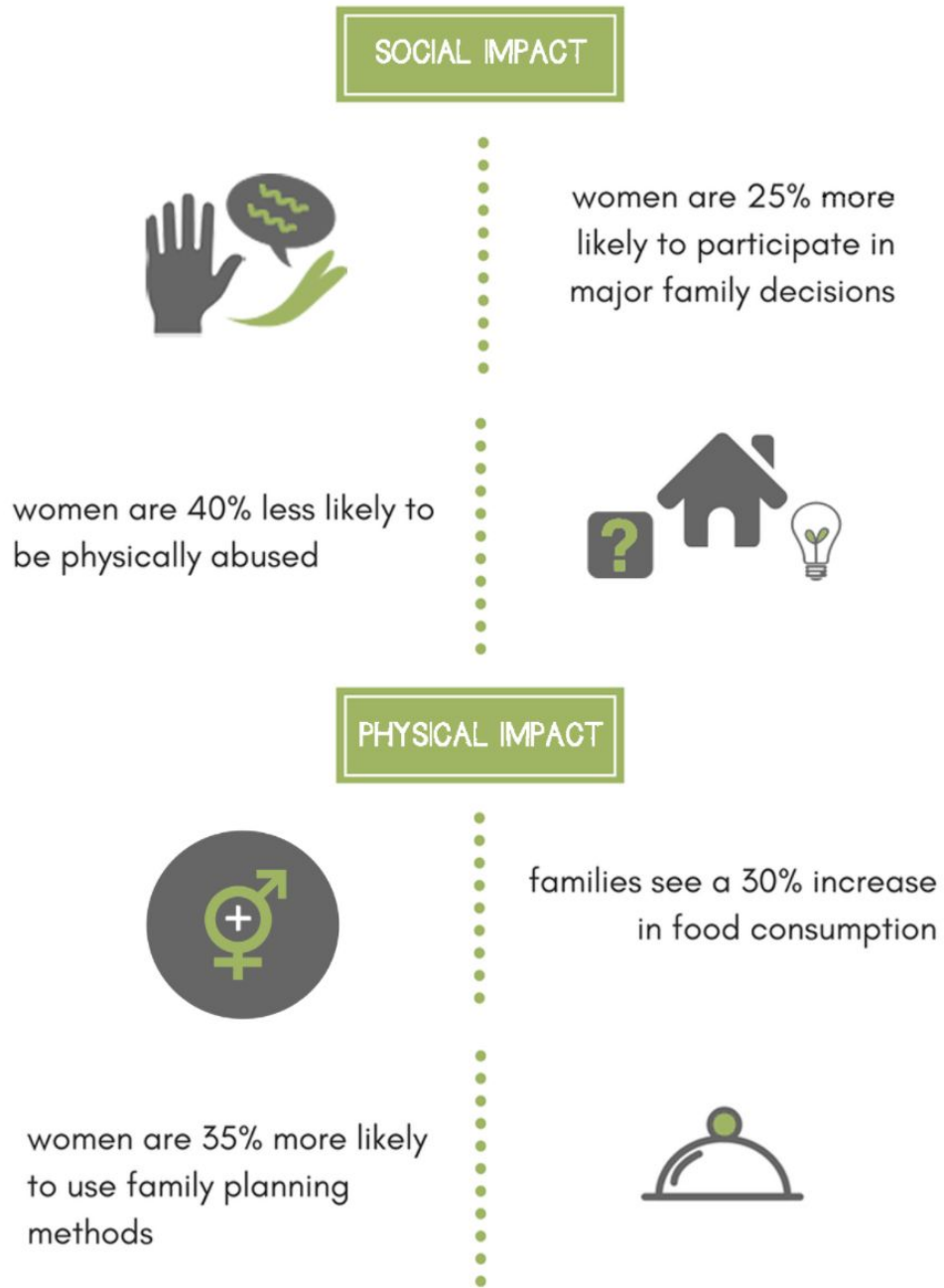
**Figures 5.14 & 5.15 Sabrina Garayar, 25-year-old of Junin, Peru** | Garayar's journey at Krochet Kids started rough, as she required time off for two consecutive pregnancies. Her resilient attitude, however, proved to make her a determined program participant. Her independent disposition is evident in her work ethic. Eventually she plans to run her own business, so that she can spend more of her free time with her family.

## CHAPTER 6

### INFOGRAPHICS



**Figure 6.1 Measures of Empowerment** Source: Thompson, Adam. “Social Impact: The Proof.” Krochet Kids International, Feb. 2014. Web. Feb. 2017.



**Figure 6.2 Social Impact**, Source: Thompson, Adam. "Social Impact: The Proof." Krochet Kids International, Feb. 2014. Web. Feb. 2017.

## CHAPTER 7

### FEATURE STORY

Poverty and vulnerability stifle the women of Krochet Kids International. They live in an impoverished district on the outskirts of Lima, a city in the developing country of Peru. Socially constructed and strictly enforced gender roles suppress many of these women from reaching their full potential. Furthermore, a single woman in her twenties is rare when motherhood is expected by age eighteen.

The mental and emotional impacts of poverty leave most women in similar situations disillusioned. Their physical needs are demanding, but their emotional stability is in even greater danger. The overwhelming need for change is paralyzing.

Krochet Kids International, an organization dedicated to empowering women, gives those in Northern Uganda and Peru the opportunity for change. The organization offers education, mentorship, and jobs to women willing to accept honesty from the counselors and long hours sewing in a regulated work environment. Each beneficiary works as an independent contractor, paid per product that she creates. Additionally, Krochet Kids offers affordable childcare, which allows the women less restriction on the hours they can work.

Krochet Kids products include hats, scarves, bags, and other apparel. These high-quality items are sold online and shipped around the world. The profit made from these sales feeds into funding the programs in Peru and Uganda.

The programs range from three to five years, depending on the participants' rate of growth and baseline health levels. Krochet Kids mentors, local specialists, monitor and evaluate the participants' psychological, emotional, and physical health week-by-week. This quantitative process ensures holistic growth for each participant, which varies widely per individual. It also promotes sustainable change that the women can implement into their lives post-graduation.

This community of women rising above poverty exhibits a collective spirit of courage. Maintaining the status quo may be an easier alternative for the participants, but they take risks for the betterment of their futures and their families. Their testimonies of change are not without struggle and pain. The end result, however, is impactful.

---

It is 4:30 A.M., and the ladies of Krochet Kids Peru are already preparing lunch. Having cooked *lomo saltado* on the sizzling stovetop, they awaken their children in the dark for a long day ahead.

The sun rises behind thick, gray clouds as young mothers send their children off to school. Shortly after, they file into their workspaces. They each exchange a quick "*buenos dias*" over the collective noises of their knitting machines, which create the sound of loud washboards across the seven buildings of their worksite.

As the day wears on, the knitting room grows hotter. Creating hats, bags, and clothing items is tedious and frustrating at times. The women knit quickly, but they produce perfection.

---



The financial stability of a job is only one factor in overall mental wellness and empowerment. Helping women realize their potential is the first hurdle that the women overcome. Convincing vulnerable women to join the program and face that hurdle presents an initial struggle.

The ladies must accept a mentality of hard work. The mentors consider earning money and respect more valuable for the beneficiaries than the finances that they acquire.

“Sometimes women think they’re coming in for a handout, but they get responsibility instead,” Jordan Zigler, 25-year-old Krochet Kids Peru Quality Control Manager of Knoxville, Tennessee, said. “Lima’s poverty has become generational and cyclical. We have to teach patience so that the ladies push past the learning curve of the job.”

Additionally, many Peruvians believe that women should stay home and leave work to their husbands. This mindset perpetuates a cycle of unhealthy relationships for some, and leads many to fear that they will be unable to provide for their children.

“Some have gone from working in the fields at their parents’ house straight to living with a man,” said Patricia Namanny, 30-year old Krochet Kids Country Director of Lima, Peru. “No one has told them that they can make it on their own.”

The ladies remain trapped by their own insecurities. It is part of Krochet Kids’ mission to correct these thought patterns.

“There’s a thin line between respect for your husband and fear of him,” Namanny said.

When a woman rejects a job with Krochet Kids, Namanny offers to speak with the husband.

“A lot of times they will say, ‘I don’t need to work. He gives me everything I need,’” said Namanny. “But this is not all they can get. They live on a mountain with no running water. We want everyone to know that they deserve a hot shower, and we want to show them how they can get it.”

---

Ask any taxi driver in Lima to take you to Villa Nicolasa, the neighborhood where Krochet Kids and many of its beneficiaries reside, and you will likely receive a perplexed look from the driver and nothing more than that. Most locals in Lima avoid the area entirely; they have been taught to fear it.

A map will prove no more useful, because the unnamed streets have no addresses. All roads leading to Krochet Kids are dirt. Just within the city limits, the district is simultaneously urban, yet remote.

Walking to work means dodging piles of trash and feces with each step. With the exception of the neighborhood’s *panaderia*, the smell of the air is consistent with those articles on the ground. Colorful buildings stand out vibrantly amidst the desert land.

Family-owned restaurants, parks, and street-side food vendors add charm to the area. A *bodega* on every corner stocks Coca-Cola and chickens plucked featherless. Rosa, owner of the shop nearest Krochet Kids, cackles with a laugh that

reaches throughout the *villa*. Her sunny disposition contrasts the gray and dismal skies that cover Lima on any given winter day.

The situation, however, worsens. Just half a mile from the Krochet Kids headquarters begins Pacifico, a more impoverished neighborhood. Homes here are not bought but acquired. Squatters take up residence, unconcerned with the safety or security of the structures. For residents of Pacifico, anything available is better than nothing.

Running water and electricity do not reach to the heights of this steep hill--neither does public transportation or governmental support. The path up and down makes no exception for anyone; even pregnant women must make the daily trek to the market or work.

The thin walls of these houses provide little protection from the elements. Mold regularly grows inside, which makes young children sick. Some even die from the long-term exposure.

Villa Nicolasa sits on the edge of the larger district of Chorrillos, which suffers from a bruised and war-torn history. Built as a beach resort and recreation center for wealthy European immigrants, Chilean invaders burned houses and plundered the residences in 1860. Only decades later, heavy fighting in the Pacific War destroyed much of its remaining infrastructure. Most recently, the district has seen irreversible damage after a devastating earthquake in 1940. The city has never fully recovered from the sequence of these tragic events. Families living there now are still victims of these consequences.

“Whenever there’s land available, ladies would skip work because they’re camping out to get it,” Zigler said. “If they stay there long enough, it becomes theirs.”

Once an individual claims the land, he or she will use it to build a home or sell it to someone else for profit. Both actions are illegal, yet extremely common. The Peruvian government does not recognize the land or the people living there.

“There are women in our program that have enough savings to move out of Pacifico, but they’re afraid of change.” Namanny said. “This type of life is all they know.”

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Mentors at Krochet Kids seek to answer this question about the women early in their program experience. Setting goals, large or small, establish the foundation for progress in the women’s lives.

“They don’t always reach for the things that they want,” Namanny said. “Some of them say that they don’t need running water, but they always want something. It depends on what they find truly valuable.”

One woman sought to provide her family with a classic Christmas experience: presents, a nice dinner, and decorations. Namanny broke down that woman’s goals into manageable, strategic pieces. The woman ultimately accomplished her dream and gained confidence in the process.

“She did it, and by proving to herself that she could do that, she could make other things happen,” Namanny said.

It requires time and growth for the ladies to understand which goals are most beneficial to strive. Mentors prompt the women with questions, forcing them to come up with conclusions for themselves. Often these discussions require reasoning on the mentors' part.

"My idea of happiness is different than yours," Namanny said. "You might not agree with someone's dream, but you have to step into it."

One woman spent over one month's salary on a birthday party for her son. While she viewed this as a worthwhile expense, it still came with consequence.

"We have women in the program that own a flat screen T.V. when they can't even afford to put food on the table," Patricia Namanny, Krochet Kids Peru Country Director, said. "It's the impoverished mindset. Their priorities are skewed after what they've experienced."

Zigler believes it is necessary in understanding empathy to recognize the connections humans experience across cultural and socio-economic boundaries.

"If we say these ladies are 'emotionally impoverished,' what does that mean?," Zigler said. "We all know what it means to be happy, sad, and angry. We relate regardless of upbringing, background, and skin color."

Realigning priorities, building self-esteem, and achieving goals are just a small portion of the work that mentors tackle with the beneficiaries. Krochet Kids focuses on 45 different indicators of growth. In weekly or bi-weekly meetings, mentors quantify and track the women's progress over time. By comparing the beneficiaries' current situations with those from when they first joined the program, mentors log tangible improvements in the quality of their lives.

Krochet Kids' statistics point to drastic change in the lives of both Ugandan and Peruvian women. Factoring these quantitative measures together makes discerning the changes per location more difficult. While Peruvian residents face generational poverty, the poverty in Gulu, Uganda is more often a consequence of war. These factors not only impact the needs of the community but also the attitudes of potential participants. The war-torn community in Uganda generally demonstrates a greater willingness to work towards empowerment. Peruvians trapped in generational or cyclical poverty require motivating with reminders that their situations can change. Some women in Peru do not initially understand the value of hard work, because they feel trapped in the cycle of poverty. Their mindset demonstrates the necessity for emotional and mental stability as well as financial.

Krochet Kids divides growth into five categories: financial, physical, social, psychological, and intellectual. This wide range of topics seeks to reach every space of the women's lives to provide for holistic change. Research and statistics demonstrate that this approach to empowerment is effective. Improvements in social and psychological health inspire financial stability and physical wellness as well.

Progress in these areas not only creates concrete transformation in the women's lives, but it also sparks generational change. These women are leaving a legacy that will empower their children and grandchildren for future generations.

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