Organizational Information
Organization Name: BlinkNow Foundation
Program Title: Kopila Valley Women’s Center
Grant Amount: $40,000 plus additional $15,750 for a total of $55,750
Main contact: Maggie Doyne and Ruth Dekker
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Stated Program Goals
- To provide a safe, positive and encouraging center and support network for vulnerable and marginalized women in our community.
- To provide the women in our program with basic reading and writing, and financial literacy to become self-sufficient, empowered, and generate income to support, feed, and educate and raise their children and families out of poverty.
- To provide the women with job training, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills
- To give our women access to maternal, reproductive, and mental health care through regular counseling sessions, screening and health checks in the Kopila Clinic and counseling center.

Milestones
- Starting in 2013 the KVWC enrolled 70 women in literacy, numeracy, human rights, personal health, parenting, and business skills training. Participants also received primary health care and counseling services. The vocational skills training focused on sewing, pattern-making, machine repair and knitting.
- In April of 2014 KVWC graduated its first class of 60 women.
- In October of 2014 the KVWC Store opened, creating employment for 17 graduates and a marketplace for the handmade goods of all participants.
- In early 2015 KVWC expanded its counseling services and created a microlending program housed at the storefront.
- In February of 2015 the second class of women were enrolled at KVWC with a vocational focus on weaving skills.

Synopsys
Throughout the first training period the women slowly and surely formed bonds with each other and gained confidence. Fortified by weekly group counseling sessions, and one-to-one mentoring and career counseling, by the end of the 13 month vocational training period the women became ready to enter the workforce. In April of 2014, a
huge community celebration and graduation ceremony took place and it was wonderful to see the women gleaming on stage. For more details on the event please see our

journal: [http://www.blinknow.org/journal/entry/womens-center-graduation](http://www.blinknow.org/journal/entry/womens-center-graduation)

The center then expanded to include a retail shop in our local town, staffers by graduates of our training program and stocked with their beautiful handmade products. From October 2014 to December 2015 we focused on opening the storefront and creating a space that would stand out within the community and attract local customers while empowering the women to the next stage of putting their learning into practice. Above all, we wanted to build an environment for the women to feel safe, happy and productive in the workplace.

Investment in the building was a major part of the set up. The DFW grant funding enabled us to pay rent for the two story building and to later add additional space for a counseling center and an office for our a new microloan program.

The storefront endured some damage from the flood and landslides of the summer of 2014. We hired local carpenters to repair the space and build furniture and shelving so we use space well and show our products to their best advantage. We also continued
training and development through pattern cutting classes, sample making, customer research, marketing techniques and growing a working family.

In February 2015 we enrolled another 20 women to the Kopila Valley Women’s Center Program. This group of women is made up of two teams, each learning weaving as their main skill. Every week the women come together for classes covering a range of topics, including parenting, human rights, health, stress management, and self-confidence. These classes then run alongside the women’s vocational learning such as business classes and entrepreneurship in addition to weaving.

We were able to borrow four looms from another program and have postponed purchasing them for our center. We have employed a full time weaving teacher who has over 30 years of training and teaching experience. The women’s skill acquisition in just a few months has been incredible, already producing high-quality fabrics and accessories. Our mission is to be completely sustainable, making the fabrics to supply the store and also making garments from our hand woven fabrics. We are currently looking at the best location to source ethically made fair trade yarns. We believe that profits from the weavers may go on to fund future trainings.
Our women are inspiring the next generation by showing them that an education is the best way to break down social and economic barriers. Our women are working to ensure their own girls are educated, which reduces the risk of exploitation, encourages delayed childbirth, and ultimately leads to a more skilled and productive labor force in the community.

The center is alive with activity, sharing, friendship, and personal growth. Our store and center is a place for our women to hone their handicraft skills and supply the local community while gaining knowledge in sales, business, design, and creativity - bringing ideas to life.

In total we now employ 13 seamstresses, 1 cook, 1 assistant manager for the store, 1 women’s center manager, 1 counselor and 1 finance manager. We currently have 20 new women in training with an anticipated graduation in October of 2015. All together there are 38 women involved in the program. We also keep a very close eye on our 60 graduates from 2014, offering home visits and counselling services. In 2016 we intend to enroll another 20 women.

Challenges
We knew the women in our program faced significant challenges in their lives including violence at home, poor health, and lack of economic independence. Becoming trained and employed addressed some of the issues but also highlighted those that were unresolved. It wasn’t easy for women to find time and cover their duties at home and attend training each day. The women met this challenge by helping each other with child care and offering each other assistance. Also, since most women had never held a formal job, it was difficult for the women working at the store to adjust to having a full time job 6 days per week. To help each woman overcome continued obstacles we offer individual and group counselling and plenty of rest time to talk and be open about problems. We serve a free, nutritious lunch each day on site and engage in numerous celebrations together which contributes to the sense of togetherness and support.

**Program Changes**

When we first started the program our intention was to provide a broad base of knowledge about nutrition, family planning, hygiene, financial literacy and other basic life skills to participants. We did some crash courses on these topics and quickly realized that the barrier wasn’t lack of awareness; it was the lack of resources. They are really smart women with significant financial barriers, even to purchase basics like soap. We didn’t need to tell them to save their money, they knew what they needed, they just didn’t have the money. It was humbling. We realized that so many of their problems were related to lack of income - even hygiene, nutrition, and birth control. We changed our curriculum so we weren’t “preaching to the choir.”

We also intended to provide a variety of vocational skills including sewing, knitting, jewelry-making, soap-making and farming. We quickly learned that it was far more important to focus on gaining one marketable skill that they could master. Becoming a master seamstress that someone would want to hire takes time and practice so the first class became laser focused on pattern cutting, machine repair, measuring and sewing. Most women already knew how to garden so we opted to exclude that from the training and use the $200 the grant allocated for seeds to purchase more fabric and make sure that each graduate went out into the world with a sample kit displaying their workmanship to take on job interviews.

We also had to change tactics on the “daughter scholarships”. Only 18 of our participants had daughters that could be enrolled at Kopila Valley School. Some of our participants didn’t have daughters or if they did, they were not at an age appropriate to begin enrollment at KVS. We diverted some of the unused money from scholarships to pay for additional training costs. From a budget standpoint we had to invest more money than we had anticipated in property rental and setting up the storefront. We also needed to make a larger investment in fabric.
Lessons Learned

We have seen a huge transformation in the women involved in the training. Their family lives, their relationships to each other and their own sense of self have evolved and grown so much in a relatively short period of time. On the other hand, it takes time to master a trade and to acquire the skill level needed to consistently produce high quality goods with little material waste. More time is needed to make the store self-sustaining.

The most important lesson we have learned is never to give up. If you empower the women during sometimes trying times and also stay honest and transparent with your teams you can achieve great things. We have started targets within the store to show how these women can support others and learn from each other’s skills. The main part of this program is to inspire and empower, it is a bonus that one day we hope it will be sustainable and the store can making projects that will evolve to sustain the costs of the project in years to come. We are hopeful that the weaving program can really impact the whole program and help to fund the training moving forward.

Unexpected Outcomes, Organizational Changes, Strategic Changes to Address Obstacles

The unexpected events have been sad ones. We see a lot of local women suffering the hardships of everyday life, abuse and beating. We help them by offering an open door and stepping in to help them with the next course of action needed. We have great relationships with key NGO’s within the towns, who offer law guides. We lost one member of our center to suicide. This is a huge problem within our local area and one issue we are really trying to work hard to address through counseling. We currently have a counselor at KVWC only two days per week but in order to approach this more effectively in the future we are planning to hire a full time counselor.

Lives Touched

We have seen great positive changes from the result of this program. It’s so important for our youngest girls to see the empowerment of women within their community. Our mission is to empower young to older generations. The women are stronger than ever and learning everyday. Those enrolled in our program, those employed by our center and their children and families have seen a tremendous benefit. Even the women who come to enroll and receive the screening are touched by the services. This is only our second year and we have already had more than 200 women who have already been part of the screening process and are eligible for referrals and counseling.
**Measuring Success**

Our store is now turning over more than 30,000 NPR ($300) a week. We monitor this by everyday sales and analysis from the store staff. We look at the key sellers and also take advice from the local community. It is very different from a store in the U.S. We look at the events in the calender making sure we are ready and supplying the community with outfits and goods for these times of year. We record each case of counseling and make sure we log all activities, looking at ways of working more closely with the community and embracing their needs. We meet with local charities and specialists to make sure we are offering the very best of advice and care for our women.

We also monitor the happiness of our women. We like to always celebrate success, no matter how small or big. Our new trainees are welcome to our storefront to drink tea, learn and build the network to support each other and become a family.

**Expected Long-Term Results**

Our tasks include working alongside the women on a daily basis, building relationships, empowering them to dream and do, and overall inspiring them to be creative and stand on their own two feet. We are dedicated to making the Women's Center a place of learning, support, safety, and love for the local women of our area. Our dream is for the project to be a sounding board for other organizations to across the globe. Our mission is to continue to grow year by year.

**Detailed Budget**

(attached)

**Dining for Women’s Impact**

We would like to thank Dining for Women for their support and funding, without which we would not have been able to create such an ever growing and creative space for women to strive, be safe and be happy. We are grateful that you have expanded the awareness of BlinkNow and Maggie Doyne too. It seems like the amazing supporters of Dining for Women greet us at each event, chime in on social media and have generally become part of our network and family of supporters. We are indebted to you. We also hope that your faith in us and the significant return you have received on this grant funding will inspire other donors to make an investment in our work.

**Quotes**

*What is the best thing about being part of the Kopila Valley Women’s Center?*

Biju Neupane // KVWC seamstress

‘Working with these women and learning new skills’
Birmi Nepali // KVWC seamstress
‘Being with these other women and growing as a team’

Sita Shahi // KVWC seamstress
‘Having my job safe and being able to run my house’

Raddhika Ramtel // Class of 2015 weaving training.
‘I want to carry on learning more skills. I dream to produce fabrics. I have a big dream to make Surket known for amazing fabrics’

Stories:
Women’s Center Magic:
http://www.blinknow.org/journal/entry/womens-center-magic

Anecdotes (names have been changed):
Meena’s husband took a second wife and left her to fend for herself and their three children under the age of five. After she completed her training we were shocked to learn that she didn’t have any documentation which prevented her from having a bank account. After counseling and support she was able to obtain a citizen card and open a bank account and start saving. Meena is now financially independent and her two older children are enrolled in school.

Gita’s husband would not allow her seven-year-old daughter to live in the home with them. After being trained at the Women’s Center, Gita is able to support herself and her daughter in their own residence.

After graduating from the program, Didi was able to use a microloan from the Women’s Center to purchase a sewing machine to use in her home. She now makes a good income as the much sought-after neighborhood seamstress.

Using the microloan she obtained after graduation, Goma purchased a refrigerator so she could expand her business. She now sells cold drinks and popsicles from her freezer for additional income.

Sewing machines- purchased 30 with tables and stools,