



# The Sewing Labs

Create. Inspire. Thrive.

# 2020

annual report



*The Sewing Labs*  
526 Campbell,  
Kansas City, MO 64106

[www.TheSewingLabs.community](http://www.TheSewingLabs.community)



*The Sewing Labs*

*Create. Inspire. Thrive.*

# Message from the Executive Director

No one could have predicted the challenges that *The Sewing Labs* would face in 2020 with a pandemic and business closures. Yet, despite the global difficulties, we made significant strides as a young, growing nonprofit and continued making an impact in our community.

During the year, *The Sewing Labs* engaged 147 individual students in virtual and in-person classes for a total of 1,680 hours. Many of these students achieved certifications in sewing for employment or entrepreneurship, while other students learned an essential skill in today's society--sewing.

*The Sewing Labs* involved over 267 volunteers in 32,823 hours of service including participation in the classroom, with community projects, and supporting our programs.

**Expansion:** *The Sewing Labs* moved into new larger space inside the Don Bosco Community Center in Columbus Park in June, and expanded operations with generous support from local funders.

We also entered a formal marketing partnership, creating online content with an international brand, *The Singer Sewing Machine Company*, as they celebrate 170 years in business.

*The Sewing Labs* board approved an updated mission for the organization in 2020 and adopted a new DEI policy for the organization.

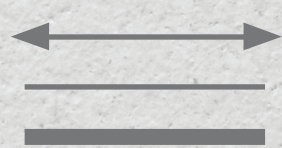
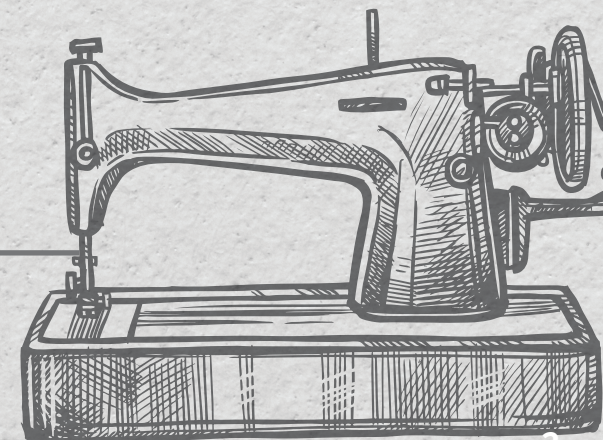
**The Mask Project:** *The Sewing Labs* activated over 200 "safe-at-home" volunteer stitchers to sew over 66,650 masks for the local community members which equates to over 31,500 hours of volunteer engagement on this project alone. Masks were then distributed at no charge to local front line workers, hospitals, hospices, daycares, police and fire departments, senior living centers, and other nonprofits.

*The Sewing Labs* secured a Volunteer Coordinator in 2020 (as a volunteer), who increased the number of volunteers engaging with our organization. Communication with our volunteers and supporters also grew significantly thanks to this volunteer role.

**COVID-19:** In March, *The Sewing Labs* closed our doors due to the pandemic. *The Sewing Labs* pivoted operations and created a video studio to deliver virtual programming with our nonprofit partners. *The Sewing Labs* successfully installed a digital check-in and tracking system for use once it was safe to re-open to in-person learning, maintaining all city and state guidelines for masking and distancing.

What we have learned from the pandemic is that sewing is clearly an essential and necessary life skill, one that *The Sewing Labs* is poised to deliver on.

In kindness,  
Eileen Bobowski  
Executive Director  
*The Sewing Labs*  
526 Campbell  
Kansas City, MO 64106

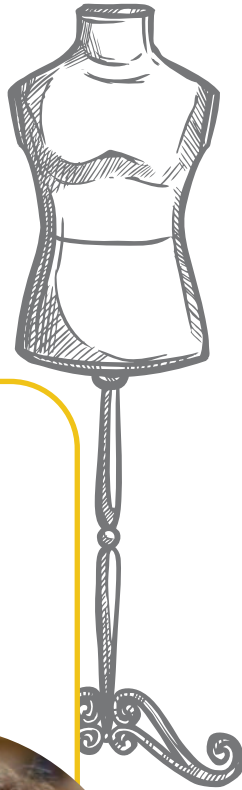


**GRAINLINE**  
**CUTTING LINE**  
**SEAM LINE**



**SEAM LINE**  
**SEAM ALLOWANCE**  
**NOTCHES & CIRCLES**

# In Memoriam



With all the difficulties that would unfold as 2020 for our world, it was with great sadness that we met the opening of the year with the unexpected passing of one of our founders, our beloved Lonnie Vanderslice. *The Sewing Labs* was blessed by the passion and friendship of Lonnie. As one of the founders of *The Sewing Labs*, she brought a vision of peace through sewing where everyone could come together from different "life-cloth" to support each other. Lonnie had tremendous compassion for this community. She was a longtime advocate for disadvantaged and struggling people everywhere, especially in the recovery community. Her heart was always in all that she did and her impact on our world has been profound. We are forever blessed by her wisdom, humor, humility, and strength.



**Eileen Bobowski, BFA**  
Executive Director



**Kris Smither, MSED**



**Kelly Wilson, BA**



**Kriss Miller, Artist**



**Nancy Petersen, BS**



**Barbara Hadley, BS**  
Board President

2020 Board of Directors



## *The Sewing Labs Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement*

*The Sewing Labs* is an inclusive and welcoming community. We support and celebrate diversity throughout all our programs. We foster connections and a stronger understanding through shared experiences.

We believe there is strength in the differences between individuals and what they bring to our community.

By uplifting a culture of diversity and individualism we encourage the inclusion of everyone, no matter their age, sex, gender, ethnicity, race ability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other identity that makes each person unique.

## Mission Statement

*The Sewing Labs* is an inclusive and welcoming community teaching the legacy of sewing for employment, entrepreneurship, and enrichment.

*Updated 2020*

## Vision

To inspire hope in populations of individuals who find themselves in at-risk situations such as generational poverty, substance abuse and recovery, immigrants, refugees, formerly incarcerated, and veterans through jobs skills training, creative sewing arts, and networking.



## Program Information

The Sewing Labs teaches sewing skills as a pathway toward financial dignity and acquiring employment and/or entrepreneurship for our clients. Classes are designed to accommodate the specific needs of the at-risk participants to provide:

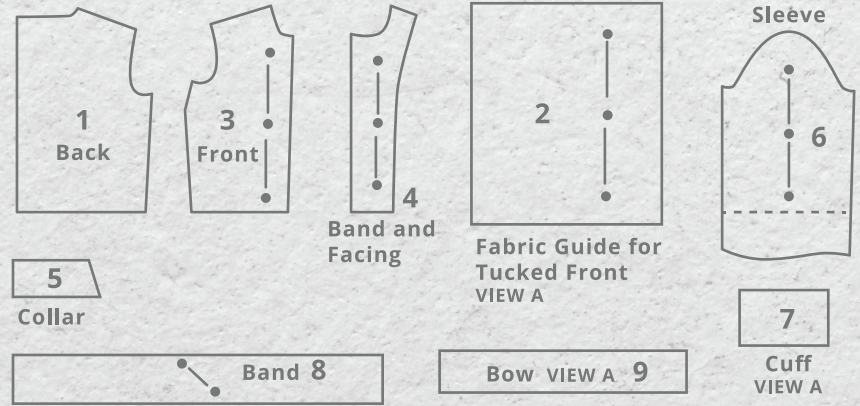
1. Job skills training in machine operator sewing, sewn product and textile related occupations and make employer connections for sewists to secure employment or become an entrepreneur stitcher.
2. The experience of a safe, supportive, nurturing community by engaging the wider Kansas City community through promoting and supporting interest in creative skills related to sewing, fabric, fiber, and textile arts in volunteer and mentor roles.

Vocational training teaches machine operator skills on a variety of equipment, industrial production systems and methods to develop a well-rounded knowledge of the industrial sewing marketplace to foster economic self-sufficiency through job placement and/or entrepreneurship. Domestic fundamental and foundational sewing skills are taught related to construction and garment design, mending and more on domestic machines and sergers. Entrepreneurial applications in basic business skills such as accounting, structure, marketing, etc. are covered. Workshops and classes might also include design and fabrication, quilting, crocheting, knitting, needlepoint, and other artistic expressions.

## Student Services

The Sewing Labs define "directly served" as the number of people availing themselves of the classes and community activity opportunities.

### In 2020, The Sewing Labs



engaged

147

individual students  
in virtual and  
in-person classes

for a  
total of

1680 hours

& included 267 volunteers

in 32,823 hours

of service including participation in the classroom, with community projects, supporting our facility and our programs.

# Curriculum

In 2020, *The Sewing Labs* staff had to shift to teaching sewing in a virtual classroom for our partnership with Literacy KC/Don Bosco Centers for the Sewing as a Universal Language course. This was no small feat and a high learning curve, yet manageable. In addition, the Annual Gratitude and Grace Quilt Retreat shifted to a hybrid event with a virtual component added. In October, *The Sewing Labs* began its cautious reopening with a small selection of classes and limited capacity in-house due to COVID restrictions with new pandemic safety protocols in place to offer workshops and classes. It was important to start with our fundamental and core subjects to re-establish our pipeline of trained sewists.



# Community Relationships

## Outreach Projects

*The Sewing Labs* community of stitchers impacted the entire Kansas City region in 2020 with the Mask Project. The engagement of our stitchers was felt across the metropolitan and surrounding areas. And when the mask supply chain balanced out, our community of “safe-at-home” volunteer stitchers who had been engaged in sewing masks expanded to sew for the Pillowcase Project and the Community Bag Project spearheaded by the Volunteer KC Organization. The Pillowcase Project is an annual Community Outreach project where pillowcases are sewn from donated fabrics and then gifted to low-income senior-living center residents to support them during holiday times. This project continues to build a strong community through service.

In 2020, **832** pillowcases were crafted & delivered to 5 different senior centers.

The Community Bag Project allowed *The Sewing Labs* to partner with another nonprofit, Volunteer KC, to again engage our volunteer stitchers through our sewing pipeline. Volunteer KC supplied all the needed materials and supplies for the Community tote bags, which were put into sewing kits and distributed from *The Sewing Labs* out to the stitchers. Upon return, Volunteer KC distributed the bags filled with essentials to Kansas City homeless populations.

*The Sewing Labs* continued to provide tours and opportunities for community organizations to learn more about the services and classes provided, however, these visits were primarily hosted by ZOOM or talking points in 2020. Relationships with organizations such as local Rotarians, Kansas City Athenaeum, Girls Scouts and youth leader organizations, Veteran groups, local sewing and quilt guilds and more continued to be nurtured.

**66,650** masks sewn and distributed to the community.

## Employer Connections

Job placement possibilities for our graduating sewist is growing from local companies active in the sewn-product marketplace. Many employers were actively connecting with *The Sewing Labs* to find sewists from our program but, due to COVID slow-downs, most students were still in training. In addition, partnerships with companies such as Growing Days KC, Celebrate Fatigues, Kushh Evolution and more, allowed *The Sewing Salon* students to expand their skill set by constructing actual products within their curriculum and lead to post graduation job opportunities.

## In-Kind Donations

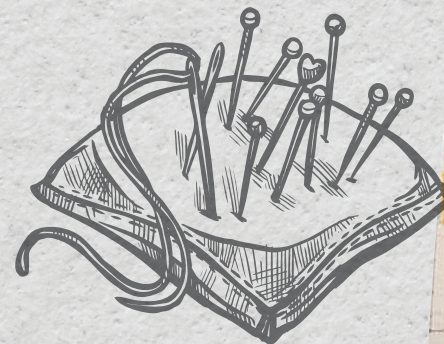
In-kind donations of fabric, sewing machines, notions, tools and supplies were abundant during 2020. During lockdown, people cleaned out their home studios, fabric stashes and made *The Sewing Labs* the beneficiary of these extra materials and supplies. This was a boon for our program. Additionally, when the need for fabrics, elastic and more was identified by the Mask Project, special individuals stepped forward to give these items and/or make financial contributions to support this community project.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Gratitude & Grace Quilt Retreat

This retreat is designed to bring a group of sewists together to build connections. The retreat is made up of a mix of veteran quilters alongside beginners and special care is taken to include individuals from our at-risk audience. The 5<sup>th</sup> annual quilt retreat in 2020 presented a unique opportunity for *The Sewing Labs* to not only expand its reach but also to build on technology and create a virtual component. The decision to host a hybrid event meant that we could host only ten students in house due to COVID restrictions, but also that we could host additional quilters virtually. The recruitment of two video volunteer assistants made this possible. This event consisted of:

- the normal quilt retreat set up of in-house persons actively making a quilt,
- “safe-at-home” quilters sewing along virtually,
- Facebook LIVE demonstrations,
- a Trunk Show of Shibori Artist, Ann Greenleaf, featured both in-person and on Facebook LIVE
- a collection of eleven pre-recorded videos by selected artist sharing their lockdown COVID artist experiences

Our attendance reached the highest attendance to date with 36 participants.



## Quilt Raffle

The need to generate critical funding while being partially closed due to COVID was the inspiration for our 1st Annual Quilt Raffle. We reached out to our community of quilters and they generously donated more than thirty quilts for the raffle. They ranged from wall hangings to bed quilts, vintage to new, and traditional to modern designs.



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the goal was to raise  
**\$5,000**

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& in total the raffle raised  
**\$5,147**

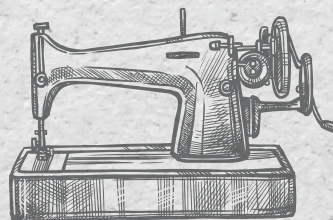
## FREE Fridays, Fabric Grab, & Open Sew

Our continued efforts to support the legacy of sewing and support the community is reflected in these recurring events. FREE Fridays were offered, weather permitting, where a sewing machine was advertised in-house and on Facebook for someone to claim. This allowed us to get sewing machines and supplies into the hands of individuals who cannot afford this equipment. In 2020, over fifty sewing machines were re-gifted to the community. Fabric Grab is our semi-annual event which is intended as a light fundraiser yet has grown into so much more. Fabric Grab is an opportunity to open up *The Sewing Labs* space, allow the neighborhood, supporters and clients to come together for conversation and fabric.



***Fabric Grab was held in September, 2020  
and even with COVID,***

over **700 pounds of fabric** (or  
approximately 2,100 yards) was exchanged for a donation,



**30 sewing machines**  
found new homes,

and we gave away over  
**1,000 pounds of free fabrics**  
(or approximately 3,000 yards) to

Open Sew is our weekly session that allows all of our students and outside sewing enthusiasts to utilize *The Sewing Labs* as a creative space. Individuals can come to sew for free, using our equipment, tools and access to our fabric stash. Open Sew allows for the "formation of a safe, supportive, nurturing community by engaging the wider Kansas City community."

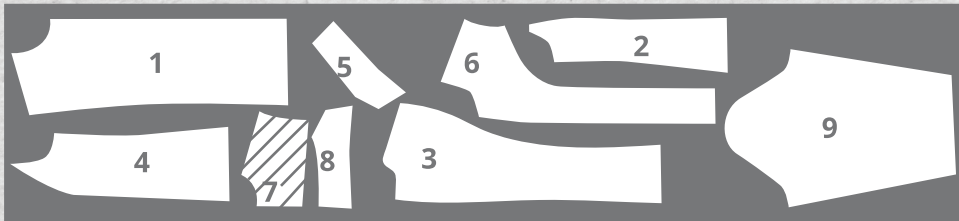


# A

## Strategic Partnerships

The Sewing Labs has strategic partnerships and collaborations with a variety of community organizations, including the following:

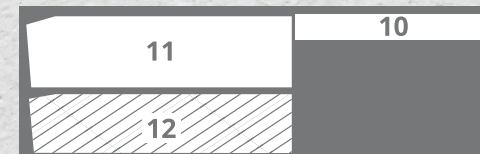
- Blue Springs Quilt Guild
- Clara Mano
- Climate Council of Greater Kansas City
- Columbus Park Plaza Seniors
- Money Smart Alliance - FDIC
- Fabriquilt/Paintbrush Studios
- Girls Scouts
- Kay-Ts Kozey's & More LLC
- KC Athenaeum
- KC Modern Quilt Guild
- KC Regional Quilt Guilds
- KC Social Media Club
- Lee's Summit Quilt Guild
- Little Sisters of the Poor
- Literacy KC/Don Bosco Centers
- Myers Nursing Home
- Missouri Sewing Machine Company
- Missouri Star Quilt Company
- MLK Senior Group
- Nighttime Needlers Quilt Guild
- New House
- Northland Quilt Guild
- Operation Breakthrough
- Rotary Clubs
- Summit Nursing Home
- Volunteer KC
- Weave Gotcha Covered
- Wyandot Behavioral Health Network



# B

## Business Partnerships

- A to Z Theatrical Supply
- Alterations & Custom Sewing
- Celebrate Fatigues
- Country Club Bank
- Cy Young Seating
- Fabriquilt
- Fashion Tech KC/KC Sewing Company
- Growing Days KC
- Knit Rite
- Kushh Evolution
- Maverick Sound Solutions
- Rightfully Sewn
- Saint Luke's Foundation
- Southwest Technologies
- United Letti
- Weave Gotcha Covered
- Women Spirit-Sacred Stitches



# C

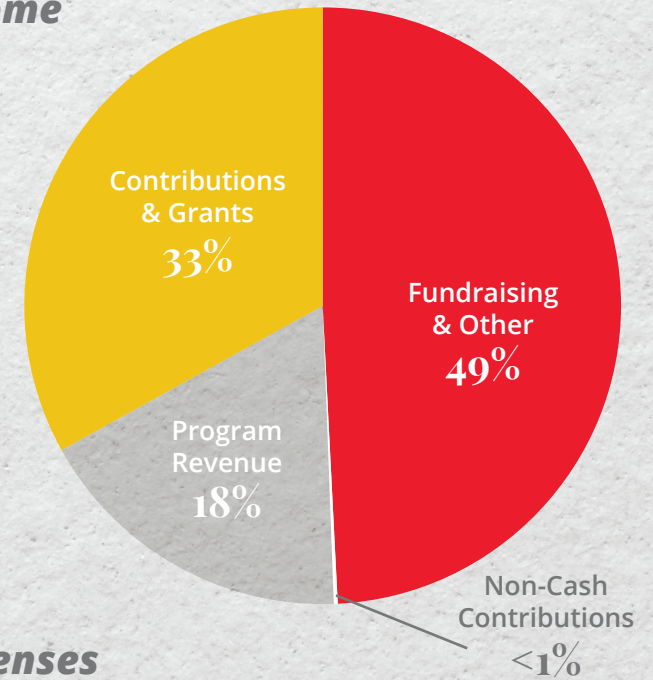
## Key Supporters

- Central Presbyterian Church
- Curry Family Foundation
- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
- JE Dunn Family Foundation
- Jewish Community Foundation
- Kansas City Athenaeum
- Kauffman Matching Gifts
- Greater Kansas City Foundation
- Liberty Sertoma
- Literacy KC/Don Bosco Centers
- Singer Sewing Machine Company
- Skills Up
- Sunderland Foundation
- Weave Gotcha Covered
- Individual Private Donors

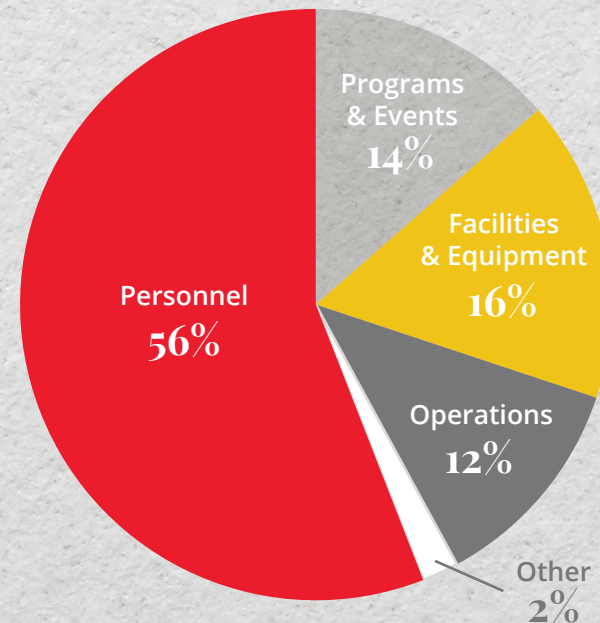


## 2020 Financials (unaudited)

### 2020 Income



### 2020 Expenses



THE SEWING LABS

KANSAS CITY, MO • SEWN IN U.S.A



## David's Story

David first realized his love for sewing during his childhood. As a young boy, growing up in the New York area, he had a beloved teddy bear. One day his teddy bear's jacket ripped, it was an older family friend that taught him how to mend the jacket by hand stitching it back together with a needle and thread.

David remembered "We just practiced and practiced and then started making clothes for the teddy bear, and this secured my love for sewing. I still have the teddy bear. And I still love to sew."

David said, "My mother and my grandmother both influenced my love of sewing as well. My mother had made some pieces for me when I was younger, like a quilt just for me."

David first seriously considered sewing as a career in his early teen years. "I was thinking about a career in sewing. I had always been around people who sewed, and knew it was possible, but then I really started chasing after it about 8 years ago, when I earnestly started to pursue a career in sewing. I started looking into different training programs and found *The Sewing Labs*."

David was living on the East coast and started doing intensive research of sewing programs and "I found *The Sewing Labs*, plus a few others in the Midwest area. So, I decided to come to the Midwest one summer and started checking out different programs." David said. David was unable to visit *The Sewing Labs* on his initial trip, but our program still really stuck in David's mind. David was connected to Newhouse Shelter here in Kansas City, and they encouraged him to write a letter of purpose to *The Sewing Labs* about his desire to enroll. After writing this letter, David was invited to come visit *The Sewing Labs* and learn about our programs. After taking a tour, David thought, "if I really want to do this and have this plan for my life, I need to be able to get training that will take me to the next steps."

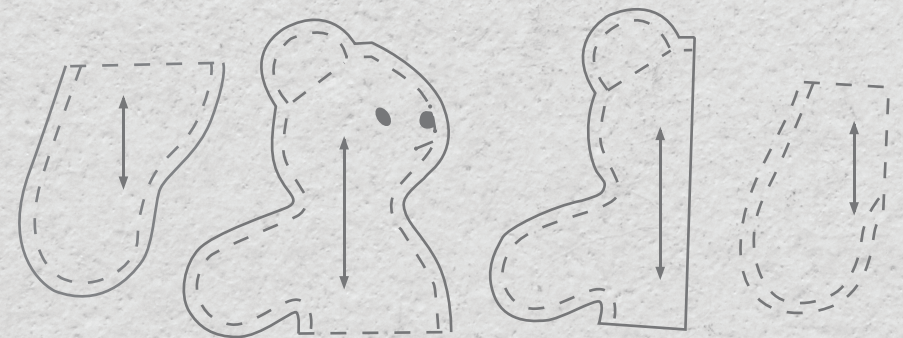
David was asked what his favorite thing about *The Sewing Labs* has been. "For me, it is the resources here to support me, like access to the teachers. Being able to come in and bounce ideas off the team. Having a safe space to learn and develop my skills. It is nice for me, if I were a little bit more advanced with certain things, they would cater to that and if I were a little bit slower, I had support. *The Sewing Labs* has helped me see more of a future for myself. I am so supported here. They have given me a better understanding of where I can go from here."

“  
*The Sewing Labs*  
has helped me  
see more of a  
future for myself.

David's goal now is to become a tailor or a fine suit maker, either working in the US or in Europe. With the fundamentals under his belt, David says, "Now I want to really develop my skill for tailoring and develop the eye that is necessary, develop the proficiency that is needed. I am now pursuing an intensive tailoring program in Europe. Potentially traveling outside the

country and mastering more hand sewing and working directly under a master tailor. That is a huge goal for me now that I understand the foundations and have the proper training on the various machines."

When asked why he feels that people should support *The Sewing Labs*, David says, "It is most important for supporters of *The Sewing Labs* to understand, there is no other program like *The Sewing Labs* in the country that offers support like this. It is not a Chi-Chi environment; it is a welcoming one."



# Lindsey's Story



Lindsey was very little when she first started to sew. "My mother and my grandmother were both quilters. While I learned how to sew, I was kind of rebellious, in the sense that I did not initially want to learn how to sew, because it was something that my mother and my grandmother did, and I wanted to do the rebellious child/teenager thing." Then when Lindsey got into college, she was a theatre major and did a lot of work in the costuming department and learned more sewing there. After college, sewing became an escape from the adult, work life atmosphere. But Lindsey wanted to get her skills a little more honed in and more fine-tuned. Lindsey wanted to achieve that perfection that all sewists are looking for. "My Mom recommended *The Sewing Labs* to me, as she had a good friend that would volunteer at the old location. And on a whim, I stopped into the old location and Linna welcomed me in, gave me a tour of the space and Weave Gotcha Covered and I instantly connected with the women and men that were in *The Sewing Labs* and the positive environment that *The Sewing Labs* brings to people and it just seemed like an obvious decision to start taking training classes here."

Lindsey first realized that she could make her living as a stitcher when she began getting really involved in the industrial side of *The Sewing Salon* training program and taking entrepreneurial business sessions as part of that program. Lindsey says, "it took me getting to a comfort level with the industrial equipment and talking with people who were encouraging me to become an entrepreneur." That's when it finally clicked for Lindsey, that she could make money with her training. This became very evident for her during the pandemic. Lindsey says, "I was working hard at developing my sewing skills and people were telling me that I could make money with it. Make a life. And I thought ok well I will give it a shot."

Lindsey officially launched her business called KC Sewing, a locally focused, cut and sew contract business that focuses on our local, home-made makers around town. Her main clientele is the crafter that one sees at a craft fair, who is super, super successful and always has all kinds of products. Lindsey wondered where they have the time and the energy to

make that many items? "Well, now it is because of me. I am helping all those craft fairs vendors with a cut and sew model. When you have a home-made craft business, there are so many things that you must take care of to make life as a crafter. And if I can help ease that process for a craft vendor by completing their cut and sew needs, it becomes a win all the way around."

Lindsey says "The most important aspect of *The Sewing Labs* is the people and the community that has developed in and around the organization. There are so many different people, from so many different walks of life, hanging out, sewing together. It warms my heart knowing that I can come to *The Sewing Labs* with a big project to do or nothing at all and come as I am and know I am always going to be inspired and welcomed."

“

I can always drop what I am doing and come to *The Sewing Labs* and be uplifted and supported.

Lindsey's advice for anyone considering entering *The Sewing Labs* training programs, is "Give it a shot, especially if you are someone who has never sewn before and is at a very basic level."

"*The Sewing Labs* has such a great program and excellent teachers who will help you with every step that you need to take. Just take it one session at a time. Or if you're someone who knows how to sew well and want to make a career out of it, take the industrial classes, and allow yourself a lot of self-discipline and know that when you're practicing, you are

working toward perfection, one stitch at a time, is the most ideal thing to do. It takes practice, we all make mistakes and that is what a seam ripper is for."

Lindsey loves the fact that now that she has graduated from *The Sewing Salon* program and that if she has a question, she can still ALWAYS come into *The Sewing Labs*, and chat with the teachers. Or if she is really struggling with something, "there is always someone here to help me out and give me the support I need. It has kind of become a recreational space for me. My home is now this micro factory and if I am in my sewing room while I am working, I can always drop what I am doing and come to *The Sewing Labs* and be uplifted and supported."