



2023

sparkventures
ANNUAL REPORT

BUILDING ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Deepening commitments and expanding on long-standing programs

This year the strength of Spark Ventures' long-standing programming shone through. Because we have more than a decade and a half of relationships built on trust with our partners and supporters, **we were able to lean into some of our partners' biggest needs, while continuing to support core education, nutrition, and healthcare programming around the globe.**

For example, our deep understanding of the nuances of the educational needs at Hope Community School has informed our "Zooming with Zambia" program. This initiative began as remote math tutoring during the pandemic, but has evolved and grown to encompass a significant advancement in Hope Community School's technological prowess - and all the opportunities that follow with this increased access.

The pandemic feels like something we are no longer living in the thick of, but the two year hiatus that it imposed on our ability to bring travelers on our impact travel experiences to see our work first hand, only truly lifted this past year. And

what a year of travel we had! We were able to jump right back into these life-changing experiences and look forward to even more in 2024.

The impact of our initiatives on the individuals and families supported by our partners continues to inspire.

"I love working together for a common good and I'm very proud of our positive impact."

- Candida Mendez | Executive Director, Las Tias (Nicaragua)

I hope that this report helps illuminate just how impactful our work together is. **Thank you for joining us this past year as we deepened our commitments and expanded on long-standing programs!**

With gratitude,



Kristin Schrepferman

Executive Director, Spark Ventures



OUR MISSION

Spark Ventures builds partnerships that lift communities out of poverty and empower future leaders.

Spark Ventures has lasting impact by directing human and financial resources to partners around the world to provide education, nutrition, healthcare, and jobs. By focusing our resources in areas of business, job creation and capacity building, we seek to have lasting and sustainable impact.



OUR PARTNERS

HOPE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Twapia, Zambia | partner organization since 2006

high-impact education, nutrition & healthcare programming for over 550 vulnerable youth + their families

A 2023 HIGHLIGHT: Using new embroidery machines, tailoring program students flexed their practical skills preparing Zambian-colored outfits for Independence Day. Hope targets students who struggle academically for this vocational training opportunity.



ASOCIACIÓN LAS TÍAS

León, Nicaragua | partner organization since 2013

community centers providing education, meals, healthcare & job skills training to over 150 youth + their families

A 2023 HIGHLIGHT: Piñata making students at Las Tías learn creative techniques, along with how to use social media to market their products - empowering individuals with knowledge, confidence and a source of income.



ENTREAMIGOS

San Pancho, Mexico | partner organization since 2017

vibrant community center dedicated to education, environmentalism and entrepreneurship

A 2023 HIGHLIGHT: Entreamigos educators pair motivational hands-on experiences and field trips with tutoring, and social-emotional support to help motivate Jungle Group students who might otherwise fall behind in the classroom.



WE GROW CHICAGO

West Englewood - Chicago, USA | partner organization since 2020

community-led organization, empowering individuals to move from surviving to thriving

A 2023 HIGHLIGHT: The "art of digital expression" program in the Spark Inspiration Computer Lab taught teens how to navigate google suites through a creative & entrepreneurial lens. They also got hands-on experience with dj-ing and social media content creation.





BUILDING ON TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

“Zooming with Zambia” laid the foundation for significant tech-based program expansion

The pandemic-instigated “Zooming with Zambia” initiative began as remote math tutoring - helping to improve Hope’s 9th grade national math exam pass rate to 80% (from 44% the previous year). Math tutoring now supplements classroom learning for 7th, 8th and 9th grade, and the technology investments are being leveraged much more broadly.

- **Targeted Capacity Building** - Subject matter experts have provided training to students (i.e. mental health and nutrition talks) and teachers (i.e. strategies for teaching English language learners).
- **Expanded Day-to-Day Use** - With projectors in each classroom and

teachers gaining confidence, it is becoming commonplace for classroom lessons to incorporate technology.

We look forward to continuing to leverage the new technology and to further empower the Hope School team to dive into the opportunities it affords during the 2024 school year.

With classroom sets of Chromebooks, laptops, projectors, document cameras, reliable internet bandwidth, and more, the robust technology infrastructure is yielding endless opportunities:

- **“Tech Phantoms” Gain Expertise** - A core group of students have been trained on IT operation and maintenance, empowering them with skills and confidence.
- **Enhanced Computer Studies** - Spark volunteers have plugged into the computer class to teach topics like Excel fluency, programming, and provide real-world career insights.



“The Zooming with Zambia sessions elicit enthusiasm and hard work from our learners and are helping understanding. Students in Twapia have little exposure to technology so there has been much talk about this program in the community - it has a great impact!”

- Chimfwembe Ng’oma | Head Teacher, Hope Community School

MORE TECH INVESTMENTS

We have made significant investments to improve technology infrastructure at all of our partners - including the establishment of computer labs, purchase of equipment, and funding to support educators who are empowering beneficiaries with the skills they need to make use of these new tools.

- Entreamigos expanded their tech center hours for the community of San Pancho to allow students, teens and adults broader access to computers and the internet.
- We Grow Chicago added programs on resume building, email etiquette, creative arts and Google Workplace. The lab also increases connectivity for many who lack internet access at home.
- Students at Las Tias have made significant advancements in their Google Slides and keyboarding skills - some students are already typing over 30 words per minute!

We are excited by the endless potential these technology investments will bring!



IMPACT TRAVEL IS BACK

A post-pandemic return to our life-changing journeys

Travel is in the core DNA of Spark Ventures and holding back from travel during the years of the pandemic was incredibly difficult. We were elated to be able to bring travel back in 2023.

MEXICO - FEBRUARY 2023

We kicked travel back off with a visit to Entreamigos in Mexico and jumped right into some of our favorite San Pancho travel highlights (like a beloved private tortilla making tutorial). Most importantly, we met with many incredible beneficiaries at Entreamigos, including Giovanna, a member of the Women's Entrepreneur Program who has a ten year old daughter and has designed her own line of crocheted bags & purses. Plus, there was extra time for fun, hands-on Valentine's Day crafts with the Jungle Group students.

supporters to "travel" within our own city to join our partners, the community of Englewood, and many others from around the city for "The Largest Community Clean-Up in Chicago." This year, 24 members of the Spark Ventures community spread out across multiple sites to help beautify the Peace Campus and surrounding blocks.



CHICAGO - MAY 2023

We Grow Chicago's Unity Day provides an opportunity for Spark's Chicago-based

"Hosting the travelers inspired me. Here, we say 'everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn' and it truly felt like the Spark travelers were there with open minds and interest in our work."

- Giovanna | Entreamigos Beneficiary



"While we worked to make the neighborhood a more beautiful place to live, work, and play, several people greeted us with immense joy and appreciation. The community is made up of intelligent, creative, caring, passionate people who want a fair chance at the game of life."

- Jason Kuker | Associate Board Member

ZAMBIA - JULY 2023

2023 travel to Zambia came in two parts - our signature impact trip, and an extended journey (the Educator Empowerment Initiative, or "EEI") that offered additional, immersive time in the Hope Community School classrooms. The profound success of this year's EEI in building deep partnerships and collaboration with the teachers in Zambia has inspired updates to our travel itinerary in 2024 to include more time in the classrooms for everyone.

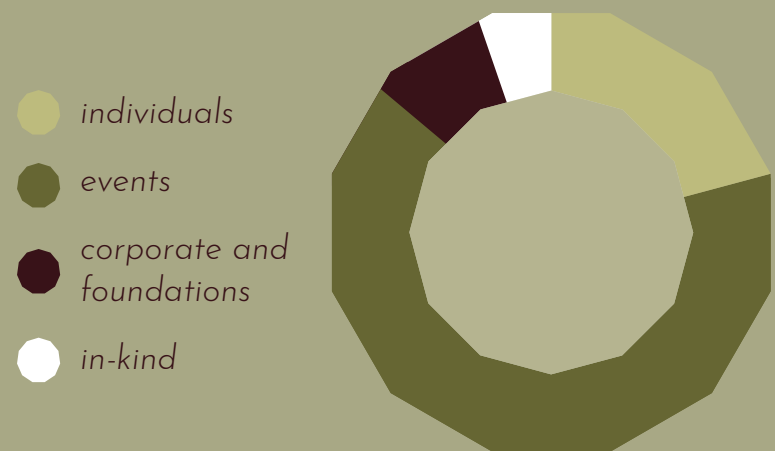
The 2023 EEI theme was Feeling Good - Inside and Out. Lessons were focused on holistic wellness, from mental health to nutrition, and were built upon Hope's existing curriculum on these topics, in close collaboration with Hope's teaching teams.



"I have found so many friends and like-minded people among Spark supporters - it helps that so many of us have a bit of a travel bug. I joined an impact trip to Las Tías in Nicaragua in 2014 and it solidified my enthusiasm for the power of this work. I have found that there are many ways to help, not only with donations but also by investing my time and expertise into our mission - via event committees and as a member of our Associate Board since 2018."

- Cassi Wade | Spark Supporter, Traveler & Associate Board Member

\$875,360
FY23 Revenue & Other Support



View Spark Ventures' full audited financials, 990 and donor listing at:
sparkventures.org/2023annualreport

FY23 BOARD MEMBERS

- Michael Campbell | Chair
- Julie Tafel Klaus | Vice Chair
- Doak Elliott | Co-Treasurer
- Tumsheen Qureshi | Co-Treasurer
- Julie Cook | Secretary
- Scott Barbeau
- Constance Benrud
- Sue Bernstein
- Rich Johnson
- Jennifer Kim
- Vicki Kraft
- Lisa Madonia
- Dan Marcus
- Patti O'Neil
- Leon Reed
- Kristin Schrepferman
- Kathy Wolf

SPARK STAFF

- Kristin Schrepferman
- Martha Vargas
- Katie Gustafson
- Michelle Morin



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Supporters in 2023



FOUNDERS' CIRCLE AWARD
Bob & Chie Curley
Jennifer Kim & Ben Hellweg
Jennifer & Gregory Stephens

STRONG FOUNDATIONS AWARD
The John & Susan Dewan Foundation
The Vallabh & Savitaben Patel Foundation

A FOLLOW UP — CELEBRATING SUGEY

An inspiration for a new program,
and now a literacy initiative graduate!

We first shared a story about Sugey (and her two sons, Elias and Junior) in our 2019 Annual Report. Travelers on a previous impact trip had a chance to meet her and heard how she was struggling to make ends meet selling gum & candy at the local markets. She felt her job opportunities were limited by the fact that she never learned to read or write. Widowed, she was doing the best she could on her own for her two boys, but times were quite tough.

Inspired by her drive and eager to fill a clear need, Spark community members Andrea Moonsammy & Beth Newton stepped up to help Las Tías launch a literacy initiative, focused on serving mothers of Las Tías beneficiaries. The women who join this program enter with little to no base level literacy. They



graduate the program when they can demonstrate a 6th grade reading level, along with some supplementary basic math fundamentals. Since the outset of the program we have celebrated 5 other graduates, but Sugey's graduation this past June was particularly poignant as her personal story inspired the launch of this initiative. In addition to literacy skills, she has taken multiple vocational training classes at Las Tías, and has overall significantly boosted her confidence and entrepreneurial drive!

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