

sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Spring 2025



A LEGACY OF IMPACT & A FUTURE OF POSSIBILITY

A Note from Rich Johnson & Scott Barbeau,
Co-Founders & Board Members, Spark Ventures

It's hard to believe Spark Ventures began 18 years ago with a simple but powerful idea - creating lasting change through deep, sustainable partnerships. From those early days, we've watched it grow in ways we never imagined. We're proud to continue serving on the Board of Directors, championing the mission that has meant so much to us. Whether providing guidance on governance and finance or taking an hour to jump on a Zoom call and give career advice to high schoolers in Zambia, we prioritize supporting Spark's mission because we see the incredible impact our grassroots partners make with limited resources.

Rich continues traveling to Zambia each year to provide professional development training at Hope Community School, supporting teachers and leadership as they empower the next generation. Seeing firsthand the impact of Spark's investments - in education, nutrition, and sustainability - reminds us why we started this journey and remain committed to its success.



Rich and Scott both joined recent virtual career days at Hope Community School. Reach out if you would like to join the next one! It's a fun and interactive way to engage with some wonderfully inquisitive students. Reach out to: info@sparkventures.org

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Hope Powers Up

Solar panels and Starlink bring improved connectivity

Increased Belonging in Mexico

Changes to Jungle Group program promote inclusion

Blooming with Possibility

\$130,000+ raised at our 2025 Spring Forward event

and more...

Last month, we were honored to gather with many of you at our Spring Forward event in Chicago. It was a night of inspiring stories, meaningful connections, and a shared commitment to Spark's mission. Seeing this community come together reinforces the collective power we have to create lasting change. Thank you for being part of this journey - we're excited for what's ahead!

HOPE COMMUNITY SCHOOL POWERS UP

Solar Energy & Starlink Internet Bring Powerful Connectivity

For years, Hope Community School in Zambia has been a beacon of education and opportunity for children in the Twapia community. But in the past year, the school faced a major challenge—Zambia, which relies heavily on hydroelectric power, was hit by severe drought, leading to blackouts lasting up to **21 hours a day**. These outages had a serious impact on public health, limiting the amount of running water accessible in an area where cholera outbreaks are a persistent risk. Hope was forced to use a gas-powered generator for their water pump, at significant cost. They also disrupted classrooms that were just beginning to regularly leverage computers and projectors in their teaching. Thanks to the generous support of the John & Susan Dewan Foundation, Hope Community School now has a **game-changing solution: solar power**. This upgrade ensures **reliable, uninterrupted, cost-effective electricity**, bringing much-needed stability to daily operations as well as a leap in the direction of environmental and organizational sustainability.



And the good news doesn't stop there—Hope Community School has also been **connected to Starlink internet**, providing a **fast, stable connection** at a much lower price. Previously, unreliable internet made it difficult to take full advantage of the myriad of technology investments Spark has made over the past few years, but now students and teachers have better access to online resources, educational tools, and connections with our ever-growing roster of tutors who Zoom in regularly to provide educational enhancement.

These advancements represent more than just modern conveniences—they are a lifeline for learning and growth. With solar energy and Starlink reducing costs and opening new doors, Hope Community School is poised for a brighter, more sustainable future.





A NEW APPROACH TO INCLUSION IN MEXICO

Updates to the "Jungle Group" program promote belonging

Our partner in Mexico shares our deep belief that every child deserves the opportunity to learn in a supportive, inclusive environment. In alignment with this value, Entreamigos has made an important change that Spark has fully supported: **the program formerly known as the "Jungle Group" is now integrated into their general scholarship program.**

The decision to unify the program came after coordinators noticed instances of bullying between students in the two groups. To create a **more inclusive and supportive learning environment**, all students are now recognized simply as scholarship students. This shift by Entreamigos promotes equity, removes labels, and fosters a sense of belonging among all participants.

Though distinctions are no longer visible, support remains strong - the Jungle Group was a subset of students who were identified as needing extra behavioral and academic help. Instead of grouping these students separately, Entreamigos has now implemented a rubric system to address their needs within a blended classroom.

This approach ensures all students learn together while **those facing challenges can continue to receive targeted support.** Spark Ventures continues to support Entreamigos in providing resources for these students to thrive.

By fostering equality and understanding, **we strengthen every child's foundation for success.**

BLOOMING WITH POSSIBILITY

"When I joined Hope Community School 18 years ago, we had 70 learners in a rented building, with no resources for teachers, supplies, or even meals. But we had one thing, hope. With that hope and support from people like you, we have transformed our school into a fully developed campus providing education, healthcare, and meals to over 550 learners. Milestones like achieving test scores 17% higher than the national averages, becoming a national examination center for Grade Nine, retaining nearly all our teachers, and strengthening the reading culture in our library have further cemented Hope as a leading institution in Zambia." -Head Teacher Ng'oma (Guest speaker at this year's Spring Forward Event)

With 130 guests in attendance, our Spring Forward event was a great success. Together, we raised over \$130,000 to invest in sustainable solutions that empower under-resourced communities around the world. Thank you to everyone who joined us!



JOIN US IN MEXICO - FEBRUARY 12-15, 2026

It may feel like a bit far out to begin travel planning for 2026, but we invite you to put our Mexico trip on your calendar now! Our July trip to Zambia this year is already registered in full and we don't want you to miss out on one of the best upcoming opportunities to see our partners' work in action. Our 4-day journey to visit Entreamigos is packed with deeply meaningful time connecting with women entrepreneurs and students in the scholarship program. Plus, the food is unforgettable! You'll join a tortilla making class, taste some of the freshest ceviche of your life, dine under the sunshine and the stars in several of the most popular local restaurants, and wash things down at San Pancho's first craft beer bar featuring 100% Mexican-made beer. Check out the full itinerary at: sparkventures.org/mexico-impact-travel



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