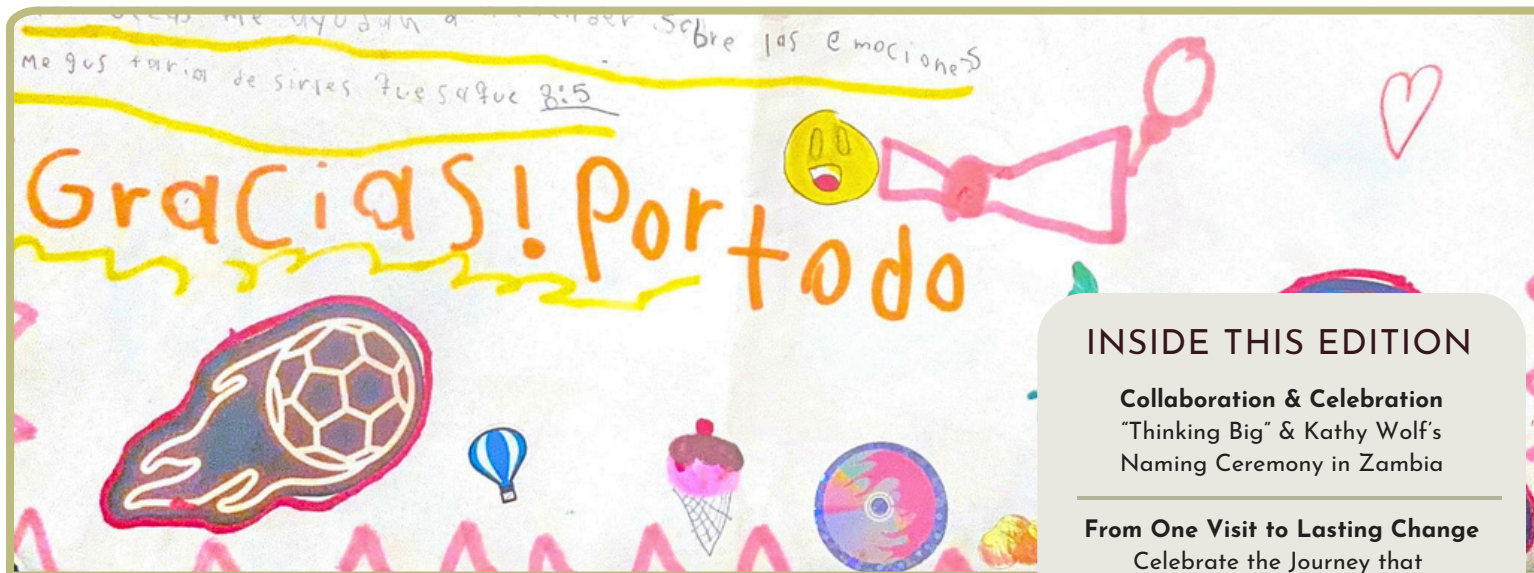




AUGUST APPRECIATION

The Heart of Partnership

August is here, and with it comes one of our most meaningful traditions: August Appreciation. This is a time when we pause to express our sincere gratitude for your support and reflect on the partnerships that define Spark Ventures. At the heart of every partnership is the shared commitment of people like **you**. Your contributions have made an enormous impact, helping empower under-resourced communities through investments in education, healthcare, nutrition, entrepreneurship, and job creation.

For many years, the Spark community has walked alongside our grassroots partner organizations as they lead meaningful change in their communities in Zambia, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Chicago. Our partnerships aren't just agreements between organizations, they're relationships built on trust, shared commitment, and mutual respect felt by everyone connected to this work: our supporters, partners, and the people our partners serve every day.

That spirit of connection inspired this year's August Appreciation gift. Enclosed, you'll find a personal letter from a program participant. In their own words, they share a bit about themselves, their community, and the programming that has shaped their life, goals, and future. We hope this letter offers a meaningful glimpse into the impact your generosity is having.

As we prepare to celebrate twenty years since the trip that inspired Spark Ventures' founding, we are filled with gratitude for our partners, whose leadership and vision continue to strengthen their communities, and for you, whose generosity helps make their work possible. Thank you for believing in our mission and for being an essential part of it. Together, we're creating opportunities and sustaining lasting change.

With deep gratitude,

Kristin Hallee Schrepferman

Executive Director, Spark Ventures

Founders Report - Summer 2026

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Thinking Big & Honoring Partnerships



This July, Spark Ventures returned to Zambia for our annual Impact Trip, where teachers from Burr Elementary School, Lincoln Park Preschool & Kindergarten, and other travelers partnered with Hope Community School for a week of collaboration, meaningful connections, mutual learning, and celebration.

The classrooms were buzzing with excitement as travelers engaged with students of all ages. The youngest were immersed in play-based learning, while students in grades 1-12 participated in “Thinking Big” lessons and creative activities focused on future careers. Beyond the classroom, travelers shared meaningful moments through small-group reading, conversations with local leaders, a traditional Zambian dinner, visits to local markets, a tour of the school’s sustainable farm, and plenty of fun including dancing, soccer, jumping rope, and traditional games.

Early in the trip, Hope’s grade 12 students and alumni gathered on campus for a meaningful journaling workshop led virtually by Spark Co-Founder Rich Johnson. Through guided writing prompts, they paused to reflect on their journeys and lessons learned along the way.

Among the trip’s most meaningful moments was a naming ceremony honoring Board Member Kathy Wolf. Those who travel to Hope ten times receive a Zambian name - a deeply meaningful honor recognizing years of partnership and friendship. Kathy was given the name **“Bupe,”** meaning “Gift” - a precious person who brings blessings and happiness.

The name could not be more fitting. For more than a decade, Kathy has been one of Hope’s greatest ambassadors, inspiring countless people to travel to Zambia, experience the partnership firsthand, and become dedicated supporters. She has welcomed Zambian friends into her home, advocated for Hope’s future, and supported programs that expand opportunities for hundreds of students. Surrounded by singing, dancing, heartfelt tributes, members of the Hope community, our travelers and her family, Kathy was celebrated for the relationships she has built and the lasting impact she has contributed to.

The ceremony was a powerful reminder that the success of a partnership is measured not only by impact, but also by the genuine friendships built along the way.

After experiencing Hope’s impactful programming firsthand, exploring the beauty of Victoria Falls, and embarking on an adventure-filled safari in Botswana, travelers returned home with a deeper understanding of the power of partnership, a greater appreciation for the people and culture behind the work, new friendships, and memories that will last a lifetime.



From One Visit to Lasting Change

Join us in October as we honor the journey that led to Spark!

Twenty years ago, Spark Ventures' co-founders traveled to Zambia and visited Hope Community School for the **very first time**. Following a discussion about pursuing life-changing experiences, the three friends found themselves in Africa building bunk beds and connecting with community members. The experience sparked the idea to create an organization rooted in partnership that continues to transform lives today.

That initial connection has grown into four long-term partnerships in four different countries. Together, with our partners and your generous support, Spark has helped expand access to education, healthcare, nutrition, entrepreneurship, and jobs while investing exclusively in community-led solutions and sustainable impact. Through their innovative programming, our partners are building equitable communities where everyone can thrive.

This October, we'll gather at our 2026 Fall Gala to celebrate twenty years since the remarkable first journey that inspired the creation of Spark Ventures. We hope you'll join us as we honor the relationships that started it all, celebrate the partnerships and communities that have grown over the past two decades, and look ahead to the lasting impact we will continue to create together.



Co-Founders Dan Marcus, Scott Barbeau & Rich Johnson in Zambia, 2006

Honoring the Past, Investing in the Future One Vision. Four Partners. Sustaining Lasting Impact.

Thursday, October 15, 2026

The Dalcy - 302 N Green St., 3rd Floor

Tickets: \$250 | Individual
\$2000 | Table of 10

Tickets on sale: Friday, August 14th



Englewood Strong

Breaking Barriers & Growing Futures on We Grow Chicago's Peace Campus



We're thrilled to share that our summer fundraising campaign in support of We Grow Chicago's Englewood Strong program was a great success! Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community of supporters, we raised almost \$7000, helping expand opportunities for residents across West Englewood.

Englewood Strong takes a personalized, community-centered approach to empowering individuals and families as they navigate challenges such as housing insecurity, transportation barriers, food access, and other obstacles that can stand in the way of opportunities. Every family's journey is different; by meeting residents where they are and responding to each person's unique goals and circumstances, this program helps individuals build lasting stability, strengthen their skills, and pursue the futures they envision for themselves.

By supporting this initiative, you're helping to expand personalized case management, strengthen frontline services, increase access to skill-building opportunities, and deepen community connections. Thank you for investing in a program that builds on the strengths already present in the community and creates pathways for residents to move from surviving to thriving.

Growing Hearts & Minds in Mexico

Empowering Students with Emotional Intelligence & Academic Support

As the school year came to a close, students in Entreamigos' Scholarship Program celebrated a year of learning, growth, and friendship. Through the program's focus on emotional intelligence, students developed self-awareness, learned to manage their emotions, strengthened their ability to express themselves, and built skills to navigate challenges. To celebrate their progress, elementary students enjoyed a beach day filled with games, laughter, and new memories. Along the way, students formed meaningful friendships and connections that will continue to support them in the year ahead. These moments reflect the growth made possible by a community of supporters who believe in their potential and choose to invest in their future.



Through a new tutoring program, 35 elementary school students from public schools across San Pancho participate in monthly sessions at Entreamigos, receiving personalized academic support and encouragement in a safe, consistent environment. The program is designed to improve academic performance while building confidence, motivation, and effective study habits. Students are showing increased participation, stronger foundational skills, and greater confidence—empowering them to thrive in school and beyond.

Strengthening Families in Nicaragua



Las Tías continues to deepen its impact in a growing relationship with Nicaragua's Ministry of Health, collaborating to provide educational workshops for parents, children, and adolescents in the community. These workshops equip families with vital knowledge on topics ranging from disease prevention and nutrition to self-esteem, adolescent relationships, family values and the prevention of economic violence.

Parents and children alike are connected with social support, healthcare services, and family guidance that strengthens individual and family well-being. This relationship is a testament to the sustainable, community-led efforts of Las Tías, working to empower children and families today and for years to come.



Newest member of Spark's Board, Hannah Prevost-Schultz, with husband Justin

Welcome, Hannah!

We're excited to welcome Hannah Prevost-Schultz to Spark Ventures' Board of Directors. Hannah's relationship with Spark began nearly two decades ago when she participated in two of our earliest Impact Trips to Zambia—experiences that sparked a lasting commitment to our mission. As someone who is passionate about bringing people together to connect, learn from one another, and build community, Hannah brings a deep alignment with Spark's values and a unique perspective as a longtime supporter. As we prepare for another year of partnership, we look forward to Hannah's leadership in helping us strengthen our organization and deepen our support for our partners.