

sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Summer 2018



A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT LIKE NO OTHER

A Note from Jennifer Kim, Spark Ventures Board Member & Fall Gala Co-Chair

In June of 2016, my family and I embarked on our first journey with Spark Ventures. We traveled to Nicaragua where we were introduced to the group of women who started Las Tías. We saw first hand the profound influence the programs have on their community's most vulnerable. Witnessing Spark's collaboration with Las Tías gave me an invaluable new perspective and a desire to be more involved.

Since then I traveled with my family to Zambia, served with the Board of Directors and look forward to co-hosting the upcoming Fall Gala (tickets on sale at the Spark website - sparkventures.org/fallgala). Throughout my involvement, I have been consistently awestruck by the generosity of the Spark Ventures community. Sometimes that generosity is shown with big gifts at our major events. Sometimes, it's through choosing to take the time to engage with our partner communities on a trip. And, most recently I saw the generosity shine through as dozens of supporters stepped up to help raise an Emergency Fund for our Nicaraguan partners during a time of need.

More on the success of this Nicaraguan Emergency Fund effort, plus other highlights of our work can be found in this quarterly report. I am deeply grateful to play a role in such a passionate and committed organization and on behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank you for your commitment to this work.

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

Leadership Interviews

Perspectives from two dedicated members of our leadership teams

Spark Community Steps-Up

Our work to create a Nicaragua Emergency Fund to counter challenges in the country

Meet Gwyn

The newest member of the Spark Ventures team isn't really all that new to our work...

AND MORE...

INTERVIEWING EMERGING SPARK LEADERS

Spark Ventures has a number of ways for supporters to get more involved. In addition to our Board of Directors, we also have an Associate Board and a Young Professionals of Spark (YPS) group. We sat down with two of our emerging leaders (Alyson Marguerat from our Associate Board and Lindsay Weickert from YPS) to get more insight into what drew them to our work.

What brought you to the Spark Ventures community originally and what motivated you to get more involved at the leadership level?

Alyson: I was originally connected through my job at Lincoln Park Preschool & Kindergarten. This provided me the opportunity to travel to Zambia in January and July of 2017. The impact of this experience, the new perspective that I gained, and most importantly the relationships within the Spark community motivated me to get more involved and eventually join the Associate Board.

Lindsay: Ryan Jeffery overheard me discussing the lack of travel experience and purpose I was feeling in my life and so he suggested I check out Spark Ventures. I instantly fell in love with the mission. The opportunity presented itself to be on the YPS board and I couldn't pass it up. I knew this would get me one step closer to traveling with Spark!

What are you most excited about in Spark's near future?

Alyson: I am most excited about the future completion of the library at Hope and for the incredible opportunities that it will generate both in the short and long term there. As Spark enters its second decade, I am excited about the new initiatives known, and not yet known, that lie ahead, and the motivation and support within the community to put those wheels in motion.

Lindsay: I am excited about our new partnership with EntreAmigos in Mexico. I believe having more partnerships and experiences will attract more people to get involved in our mission.



Lindsay in Nicaragua



Alyson in Zambia

Lindsay, we know you've traveled to Nicaragua - what was the most memorable part of engaging with Las Tías on that journey?

Lindsay: We got to experience a home visit with one of the girls from Las Tías. She had experienced domestic violence and it impacted her performance in the classroom, her mental and physical health, and her spirit. Hearing the story from her mother's point of view while her daughter was listening was heart-wrenching. However, it was because of Las Tías' program that she was able to jump to the top percentile in her school, her health improved, and she was able to regain her confidence and childlike attitude. We rode back to Las Tías with her and sang and danced to Justin Bieber's Despacito and it was the most amazing experience that I will never, ever forget.

Alyson, we know you've been to Zambia twice now, what are you most excited about when you think about re-visiting Hope?

Alyson: When I think about returning, I feel most excited to see friends and familiar faces, and to see the progress that has happened. I look forward to being re-energized by the joy and love that is shared so graciously there.



THE SPARK VENTURES COMMUNITY STEPS-UP

An Outpouring of Support for a Nicaragua in Need

The past few months has seen a previously peaceful Nicaragua erupt with civil and political unrest, resulting in hundreds of protester deaths. In the midst of this national turmoil, our partners at Las Tías continue to provide critical nutrition, education and healthcare to some of their community's most vulnerable children. Their work is made even harder by road blockades, food shortages, and violence that has impacted the lives of many in León and around the country.

Making things even more challenging, one of Las Tías' other supporting organizations had to discontinue their financial support when their tourism revenues dried up. This funder supported, among other things, the salary for the on-staff psychologist. Without their support, a critical resource for children who have experienced traumatic events while living in the midst of uncertainty and instability was in jeopardy.

Faced with this challenge, the Spark Ventures community stepped up to the plate in a BIG way. Our team launched a campaign to raise an Emergency Fund to help fill the gap for Las Tías with an initial goal of \$2,500. *Thanks to a tremendous outpouring of support we were able to quickly surpass that goal and are on track to raise a total of \$10,000 to help Las Tías through these challenging times.*

While the Spark team has been overjoyed watching the contributions come in, knowing the impact this support will have on Las Tías' ability to continue to provide critical programming, perhaps the best part has been contacting the Las Tías team to let them know that the Spark community not only stands with them, but went above and beyond to demonstrate their support. Candida, Director of Las Tías, expressed her gratitude to each and every member of the Spark Ventures community and emphasized that this contribution does not just represent alleviation of a financial challenge, but it also inspires her team to know that there is such a generous community of individuals supporting them despite their country's challenges.

More on the Nicaragua Emergency Fund can be found at: sparkventures.org/nicaraguafund

MEET GWYN

We are excited to introduce you to our newest team member, Gwyn Thomas, taking on the role of Marketing & Events Manager who joined the team in mid-July. Gwyn has a history traveling and working with Spark Ventures and we are happy to see her familiar face back in the office.

Your first day on the job wasn't your first introduction to Spark Ventures, tell us about your previous involvement in our work?

Gwyn: I had the opportunity to travel to Zambia back in 2016, and visit Hope School for the first time. Upon arrival, the importance of the partnership between Hope and Spark became very clear to me. I experienced how Spark's programs were changing the lives of the children at Hope, and how my life was being changed by engaging with them. I went on the trip thinking I was going to be helping the community when, to my surprise, we were helping each other simultaneously. After coming back home, I had a feeling my time with Spark was not quite finished.

That winter and through the next Spring, I worked with Spark as an intern to plan, prepare and execute the 2017 Spring Wine Tasting. To say I fell in love with the Spark community would be an understatement. When the chance arose to play a bigger role in this organization, I could not pass it up. I am overjoyed to be in this position and to continue my story with Spark Ventures!

What excites you most about joining the Spark Ventures team?

Gwyn: I am excited to dive in to the relationships Spark has built and share the stories of progress and success with the entire Spark community. Especially having the opportunity to build relationships with the partners we have in Nicaragua and Mexico, considering I have only traveled to Zambia thus far. I am also excited to contribute to Spark's continued growth by organizing many more successful fundraising events. The events are an amazing testament to how the Spark community continues to invest in the future of our partnerships while celebrating the joys and accomplishments of our partner organizations.

Check out the rest of our interview with Gwyn on the Spark Blog (sparkventures.org/blog) to hear about some of her most memorable moments in Zambia and more...



TICKETS ON SALE NOW ANNUAL SPARK VENTURES FALL GALA

Thursday, October 18, 2018 // 6-9pm

The Ivy Room // 12 E Ohio St., Chicago

sparkventures

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