



sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Fall 2020

THE SPARK VENTURES COMMUNITY IS GROWING

A note from Scott Barbeau, Spark Ventures' Co-Founder & Board Member

At our recent Fall Gala, I had the pleasure of announcing a new partnership - our very first partner organization in the United States, I Grow Chicago. We are so inspired by the work they're doing and honored to contribute to the impact they're having in Chicago. You can learn more about their impact in this report.

Spark Ventures' incredible partners have been on the front lines helping their communities for years, and are each taking on especially critical roles now during this health and economic crisis. Thanks to the Spark Ventures community, even in these incredibly challenging times, we've been able to provide uninterrupted funding to our partners to operate meal programs, continue educational support, pay salaries, and provide mental & physical healthcare while schools and centers were closed. We also provided additional emergency funding for PPE, hygiene supplies, and most urgently, for extra supplies of food as many are facing extreme food insecurity and famine. Over the past few months, our partners have provided about 2,000 masks, 9,000 bars of soap, and over 40,000 meals to their vulnerable communities.

As of today, all of our partners are beginning to reopen - even offering new programming to meet the changing needs of their communities. The needs continue to be immense and we will continue to stand by their side.

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

Las Tías Celebrates 31 Years

Hear first hand from a mother and son who have benefited from our Nicaraguan partnership

Welcome I Grow Chicago

Introducing Spark Ventures' newest local partnership

Thank You to Dan Marcus

Spark Ventures co-founder, Dan Marcus, is awarded Emeritus status on the Board

AND MORE...

LAS TÍAS - TRANSFORMING LIVES FOR OVER 31 YEARS

Our Nicaraguan partner organization, Las Tías, celebrated their 31st anniversary on September 16th. Attendees of our virtual Fall Gala were able to hear directly from Giuber and his mother Verónica - two beneficiaries who exemplify the transformative impact Las Tías has on their community. We are honored to share their words here.

Verónica López is the mother of two children who have participated in many of Las Tías' programs over the years and she is a beneficiary herself. Among the many other services Las Tías provides her family, Verónica is attending the literacy program where she is improving her basic reading and writing skills. While reading her notes for her event speech made her a bit nervous, she was eager to let our community know the impact Las Tías has had on her life and those of her children.



"Las Tías has been supporting my children since 2014, and now supports me as well. My husband does not have a permanent job. I have a job washing and ironing clothes to support my family, but I don't always earn enough. At Las Tías, I have been learning to make piñatas and hope to sell them to support my family. I am also participating in the literacy program - learning to read and write so I can open new doors. Through this program, I am earning a small bonus and receiving packages of food each week. Las Tías has changed my life and the lives of my children. Thank you for your support."

Verónica's son Giuber was also enthusiastic about sharing his personal story with our community. His story is a profound example of the trajectory Las Tías can set for students - helping them attain higher levels of education that they otherwise might not have been able to achieve by providing holistic support on their journey - from basic nutrition needs to educational support and psychological counseling.

"Las Tías has provided me with educational and psychological support. I have benefited from their English classes, carpentry training, and music program. I have also deeply appreciated their healthy meal program. Thanks to this support, I am pursuing a degree in accounting at the Juan de Dios Muños Institute. My sister is also there, pursuing a computer degree. We both graduate this year! I really want to give credit to the programs that Las Tías offers, for example, the meal program. It is a huge benefit for us, and it reduces the strain on what our parents need to provide. It is enormously helpful. Also, the educational support is powerful - each day I am here, they help me with my studies. I am here, not just speaking for myself, but for all the beneficiaries at Las Tías, we are deeply grateful for the help you have provided us. Thank you."

We are so grateful to Verónica and Giuber for sharing their stories with us, and to the other beneficiaries from Hope and Entreamigos who spoke at our event. We will be sharing videos of all their personal stories of impact on our social media platforms over the next few weeks. Please be sure you're following us on social media (@SparkVentures) to catch these powerful videos.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US FOR A POWERFUL EVENING, "TOGETHER"

We want to share our most sincere gratitude with everyone who attended & supported our virtual Fall Gala. With over 200 members of the Spark Ventures community from around the world in attendance, we raised over \$190,000! We showed that we are truly "Better Together" - even when that "together" is virtual.

On behalf of Spark Ventures and the children and communities we serve - thank you so much for your generosity. Thanks to your support, the lives of future leaders in four distinct communities around the world are being transformed. We are sincerely grateful.

INTRODUCING: I GROW CHICAGO

Introducing Spark Ventures' newest partnership with I Grow Chicago! We're honored to support their programming, excited to expand our impact, and for the first time in our history - have the opportunity to engage with powerful partnership initiatives right here at home.



I Grow Chicago is a community-led organization whose programs closely align with Spark's mission to provide sustainable solutions to lift communities out of poverty and empower future leaders. I Grow Chicago was founded in 2013 at the corner of 64th and Honore - in Chicago's south side neighborhood of Englewood. From one woman's idea to a whole neighborhood's heart, I Grow Chicago is the story of people coming together and working for change. It's a history of violence and trauma but also one of hope, resiliency and most of all, love.

With years of disinvestment and structural racism, Englewood had become an opportunity and resource desert, leading many into the street economy to survive. Children couldn't play outside, and residents stayed in their homes out of fear.

Today, the Peace House stands at the same corner where the seed for I Grow Chicago was planted. It serves as the community center on the neighborhood's Peace Campus - a gathering and healing zone made up of 6 previously vacant lots and 2 homes. This campus is home to nearly 15 different programs, all run by community members and volunteers that assist every generation of West Englewood. Residents learn the tools they need to stop violence before it starts, from how to take a deep breath before reacting to how to apply for and succeed in jobs.

Spark Ventures provides funding to support I Grow Chicago's "Born to Thrive" program. This program now provides in-person educational support for remote learning on the Peace Campus. Forty of the neighborhood's most vulnerable children and teens receive technology and internet access, school supplies, social-emotional support, peer-to-peer activities, meals & snacks, transportation, and advocacy. With Spark's support, I Grow Chicago has employed three community members to staff the "Born to Thrive" program. They are educating and advocating for children at a critical time, in a neighborhood where the barriers to virtual learning disproportionately affect students while schools are closed due to COVID-19.

We are looking forward to a future of collaboration with I Grow Chicago and focusing on sustainable initiatives to empower the community of Englewood.



DAN MARCUS - BOARD DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Dan Marcus, along with Scott Barbeau and Rich Johnson traveled to Zambia in the summer of 2006. The trip was nothing short of life-changing and was the spark that inspired Spark Ventures. For over a decade now, Dan has served on the Spark Ventures Board, providing key fundraising support and strategic guidance. He has recently stepped into a new role of Director Emeritus and to mark that occasion we had a great conversation with him.

What do you remember most about your first experience at Hope?

Zambia knocked my socks off. My first day in Zambia felt like it was a year long. Everything was so new to me. We were flying by the seat of our pants when we got there! The highlight of my trip was building bunk beds for the orphanage. I had no woodworking skills but I built some bunk beds in college. We went to the store and bought the wood and nails. We built them and the kids loved them and painted them.

What has it meant to you to be a co-founder of an organization that's changed so many lives?

When I went to Africa, I didn't go there to start Spark - I went to go and come back. I'm happy and proud of what Spark has become. I'm glad that we could do what we did. The impact of what we did with Spark has been incredible.

Taking people to places like Zambia, Nicaragua and Mexico puts their life in perspective. It gives them framing and makes them more empathic, more caring and more appreciative for what they have. I'm very appreciative for what I have in my life.

Read our full interview with Dan on the Spark Ventures blog: sparkventures.org/blog

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