



# sparkventures

## FOUNDERS REPORT

Spring 2021

### MARKING A YEAR OF BEING "TOGETHER" IN A NEW WAY

A Note from Board Member and Wine & Dine Host, Vicki Kraft

I joined the Spark Ventures Board of Directors shortly before our second virtual event. So, I have yet to feel the electricity of a large-scale, in-person Spark Ventures event in Chicago. Before the pandemic, I did have the honor of visiting our partner in Mexico where I was energized and inspired by their determined efforts to serve their community. This made me even more excited to share a room with the Spark Ventures community - a group of people like me who share a passion for our mission. In the meantime, I'm astounded by how connected I already feel to this community of like-minded, caring individuals. We all share a deep commitment to ensuring our partners around the world have the resources they need to thrive, regardless of whether or not we can be together to raise a glass to that goal.

This passion was yet again on display at our most recent Wine & Dine event and I am so grateful to all our supporters who logged on to hear updates from our partners, stories of transformation, and make generous contributions to our work.

There are many more inspirational things happening at our partner organizations than we were able to share at the Wine & Dine event. We've included some additional updates and stories of transformation in our Founders Report. I know you will be uplifted as you read through the Founders Report! Thank you for being a valued member of the Spark Ventures family, and being "here" with us over the past year.

#### INSIDE THIS EDITION...

##### Meet Santiago

This dedicated 17 year old exemplifies the impact of Las Tías' work in Nicaragua

##### 2020 Spark Heroes

Profiling some dedicated, creative individuals from the Spark Ventures community

##### Charles' Recovery

An update from Zambia on Charles' battle with COVID, his hospitalization, and ongoing recovery

AND MORE...

# BARBER TODAY, TOMORROW... A TROPICAL AGROECOLOGIST!

*Our partner organizations have countless beneficiaries whose stories inspire us to do what we do. Santiago Fuentes is undoubtedly one of them. Learn more about his upward trajectory [here](#), then hear from him in his own words in a video recording on the Spark Ventures blog ([sparkventures.org/blog](https://sparkventures.org/blog)).*

When we asked the Las Tías leadership team to identify a couple individuals whose stories of personal transformation we could feature at our Wine & Dine event, they came with a list. Those of you who logged in to the event were able to meet Sughey (watch her story at [sparkventures.org/sughey](https://sparkventures.org/sughey)), an inspiring mother of three whose pride of learning how to write her name in the new literacy program beamed through the Zoom screens into all our hearts. We were also able to capture Santiago's personal impact story on film, but weren't able to share it the night of the event due to time constraints - so we invite you to visit our blog to meet this inspiring 17 year old as well.

Santiago's homelife has been difficult, primarily due to poverty. His mother was barely supporting the family before the pandemic hit by stringing together cleaning jobs. But because of COVID, those jobs have all but disappeared and the family has been driven even deeper into poverty.

Throughout all of the challenges, Santiago has remained focused and credits Las Tías for helping his family survive the past year. At Las Tías, he receives meals Monday through Friday and support with his school work. The psychologist has helped him significantly over the years as well. Spark Ventures' COVID Response Funds provided his family with extra packages of food to help weather this difficult time. Along with graduating high school, Santiago recently completed the barbershop vocational course at Las Tías and he is using his skills to help fund his ongoing educational aspirations. When we asked the Tías if there was anything they would like to share about Santiago, their eyes lit up and they told us he is a student with a bright future ahead of him, they just know is going to go places.

What's next for Santiago? He just enrolled in a local León university to pursue a degree in tropical agroecology. We look forward to checking in with Santiago as he continues his education. Thanks to your support and Las Tías' dedication, he is following his dreams and hopes to support his family some day.



## WINE & DINE SUCCESS

### GROWING TOGETHER AND EMPOWERING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

On April 22nd the Spark Ventures community once again gathered virtually to celebrate the impact our efforts have around the world, and to raise funds to support this ongoing work. While we look forward to being able to raise a glass together, the virtual format of our events this past year has had the silver lining of allowing us to connect with many new supporters from around the country who otherwise might not make it to a traditional Chicago event. With friends new and old (and while enjoying a customized chef demo), together we raised over \$250,000 in support of our partners and their efforts to empower future leaders. Thank you to those of you who helped make the event so special and successful!



## SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHTS: 2020 SPARK HEROES

*We had to get creative over the past year to stay connected with our community of supporters and engage with our partners while our trips are suspended. The Spark Ventures community has stepped up to the challenge, enthusiastically identifying new ways to deepen our connections across the globe. We're featuring some creative and passionate supporters here - they are each exemplary in their own right, but also serve as a sample of the many, many other supporters who have helped make an impact from home.*



### ANDREA MOONSAMMY & BETH NEWTON

After traveling to Nicaragua in 2019, Andrea & Beth recognized a need and took action. They met Sugey, a mother of Las Tias beneficiaries and a street vendor in the local markets. Sugey shared that it's hard for her to earn a living wage because she never learned to read or write. Andrea & Beth came up with the idea to begin a literacy and vocational skills program for mothers like Sugey. The program has been a great success and is empowering women by giving them the confidence and skills to help them provide for their families and take pride in their accomplishments.



### ASHLEY BAILEY

Lincoln Park Preschool & Kindergarten (LPP) is a longstanding Spark partner - and the sponsor of Hope Community School's preschool and library in Zambia. Ashley, an LPP teacher, visited Hope in 2018. When the pandemic hit, she knew she wanted to get more involved with Spark and our partners. She joined the Spark Ventures Associate Board, despite only being able to gather virtually. She has been collaborating with other Associate Board members on fundraising projects & events to support Spark's COVID Response Fund.



### JEAN JANECEK "JJ"

JJ has traveled twice to Zambia and built deep bonds there, especially with the elderly women in the community. She helped launch the "Women of Worth" initiative, which is fulfilling nutritional, healthcare, emotional and social needs of Twapia's elderly women and helping them age with dignity. JJ's kindness & compassion have improved so many lives, most recently through her generous support of Spark's COVID Response Fund which has helped provide COVID testing, PPE, soap & sanitation supplies, and most importantly - food for vulnerable families in the community.



### PATEL FOUNDATION

Yashvant Patel and his siblings Paresheh, Kiran and Pushpa Patel of the Vallabh & Savitaben Patel Foundation, have personal connections to Zambia. They grew up in Ndola, not far from where Hope Community School is located. In the past years they have made many generous contributions to Hope's school and farm as a way of giving back to a community they care deeply about. In the past year they continued their support by providing funding for a new truck at the farm, which will allow the team to get more produce to local markets more efficiently. This is a very valuable addition to the farm's operations as they work to augment Hope's financial sustainability with farm profits.





## AN UPDATE FROM ZAMBIA: CHARLES' RECOVERY

Some of the most difficult days in the Spark community in the past year were the 35 days that Charles Mumba, Executive Director of Hope Community School, was hospitalized with COVID. As a diabetic, his complications were life-threatening. Thanks to Charles' family, the Hope team, and support from the Spark Ventures community, he received the best possible care - despite the conditions in the under-resourced local hospital. We are beyond grateful for all the incredible doctors and nurses who worked so hard to save his life.

Charles is still working on his recovery, including regular physiotherapy to regain his strength. He is already feeling well enough to return to work part-time at Hope where he is happiest - providing quality education, healthcare, nutrition and jobs for his vulnerable community.

Charles expressed that the messages of compassion he received from our community gave him strength to keep fighting for his life. He shared a video message of thanks with our community, which we shared at the Wine & Dine. We invite you to view that video at [sparkventures.org/charles](https://sparkventures.org/charles).

As the virus continues to have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities around the world, we know all of our partners must remain hyper-vigilant in their battle to keep their communities safe. Thanks to our COVID Response Fund, we have been able to equip Hope Community School with PPE, additional sanitation & hygiene supplies, packages of food to combat severe levels of food insecurity, and funding for COVID testing.

Please help us support all of our partners' efforts by making a donation to Spark's COVID Response Fund: [sparkventures.org/covid-fund](https://sparkventures.org/covid-fund)

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PO Box 641004, Chicago, IL 60664 | 773.293.6710  
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