



# sparkventures

## FOUNDERS REPORT

Summer 2021

## A SILVER LINING IN A DARK YEAR

### A Note from Board Treasurer, Doak Elliott

It feels repetitive to highlight that the pandemic has brought unrelenting challenge after challenge. But the realities of the past months (and months, and months) have had a deep effect on the lives of those served by Spark's partner organizations, as well as the lives of those in our donor community. However, the response to our call for emergency COVID response support has been profound.

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of our community, we have been able to amplify our funding to fill the needs caused by the pandemic, and we have even been able to augment our funding for other key initiatives at our partner organizations. This support has included:

- COVID response support for PPE, testing, sanitation & hygiene supplies, and critical supplies of food to combat serious levels of food insecurity.
- New educational programming to support at-risk youth who fell behind while schools were closed due to COVID.
- Microloans to support small business entrepreneurs.
- Critical maintenance and facility repairs.

More details on each of these initiatives are included in this report, plus further updates on what we are accomplishing with your support. Thank you for standing alongside us on this journey.



### INSIDE THIS EDITION...

#### COVID Update

Update on vaccination and COVID precautions

#### Deepening our Impact

New initiatives, thanks to your support

#### Fall Gala Invitation

Join us on October 28th for a memorable evening

AND MORE...

# AN UPDATE ON COVID AT OUR PARTNERS

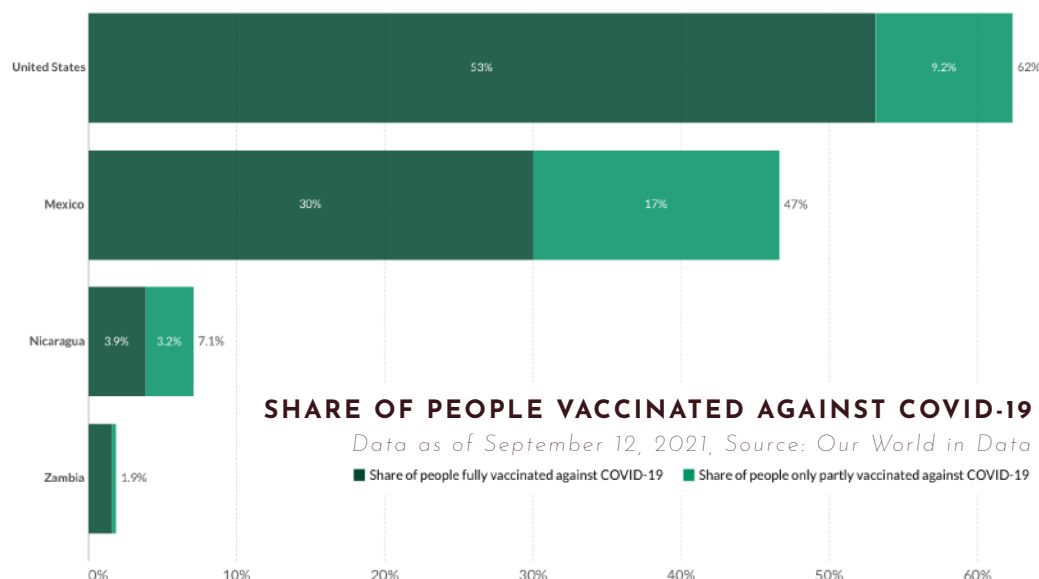
While we are grateful for widespread access to vaccines in the US, this is not the case in all the communities we serve. The COVID pandemic continues to have a profound impact on our partners. Read on for an update on vaccination and COVID precautions.

In the US, vaccines are widely available, but we are still seeing disproportionate adoption. In Chicago, 70% of the COVID deaths were Black residents, even though Black people make up only 29% of the city's population. And Englewood (the community I Grow Chicago serves) has consistently ranked as one of the zip codes with the lowest vaccination rates in all of Chicago. I Grow Chicago is working hard to inform their community about the benefits of receiving a vaccine, including a vaccine clinic hosted at the Peace House and regular discussions about the vaccine to ease nerves and answer questions.

In Zambia and Nicaragua, where vaccination rates are exceptionally low due to scarcity of access, we are grateful that at least some of the most at-risk members of leadership at both Hope and Las Tías have been able to receive vaccinations. However, a majority of our partners' staff (including those at Entreamigos in Mexico) either aren't eligible or have not been able to access a shot yet.

Hope Community School has suffered two rounds of key staff members contracting COVID, with a small number of individuals having serious complications from the disease (requiring hospitalization and/or critical care). Thankfully, all are on a positive trajectory towards recovery. In addition to the health crisis caused by COVID, all the communities we serve have experienced significant economic impacts stemming from pandemic restrictions that have caused even higher levels of unemployment and exacerbated existing poverty levels.

Donations from the Spark community to the COVID Response Fund will continue to provide food, critical PPE, sanitation supplies, COVID testing, healthcare, and support for awareness efforts. You can contribute directly to this fund here: [sparkventures.org/covid](https://sparkventures.org/covid)



## LANTERNS FOR LITERACY LIGHTS UP THE NIGHT

The Spark Ventures Associate Board spearheaded a successful fundraiser for solar-powered lanterns for students served by our partners. Many who are supported by Spark's literacy & education initiatives lack electricity or adequate lighting in their homes; making it difficult to study & read after dark. Thank you to all who contributed to this initiative and to our Associate Board for spearheading the fundraiser, including a successful trivia night in Chicago. The lanterns are helping us continue to elevate vulnerable communities by ensuring that future leaders have the resources they need to achieve their potential.



# DEEPENING OUR IMPACT THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT

*Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the Spark community, we have been able to address the needs of our partners during the pandemic head-on, not only providing ongoing COVID response support, but also addressing additional fundamental programming needs. Here's a brief outline of some of the initiatives made possible by your support.*



## I GROW CHICAGO | CHICAGO, IL

This summer, Spark Ventures provided funding for I Grow's "Kids on the Move Summer Camp." The camp provided a safe, joyful and loving place for 30 children, ages 6-12 to learn, explore, move, and build new friendships. Alongside opportunities like basketball, art, gardening, and weekly field trips around the Chicagoland area, children also engaged in various games to strengthen physical, mental, and emotional growth. Social work interns facilitated "peace circles" and campers participated in a "kindness campaign". These experiences were especially important following many months of social isolation due to COVID and safety concerns in the community.



## HOPE COMMUNITY SCHOOL | ZAMBIA

In the past months there have been multiple confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Hope Community, including Director, Charles Mumba and Teacher Ngoma. Both are recovering well and Hope has redoubled their safety precautions. But with persistent COVID cases in the community, the health of our friends in Zambia is a top concern. To help respond to this crisis, Spark sent emergency funding for additional COVID testing, cleaning & sanitation, PPE, and COVID-related healthcare costs. We are also providing supplemental food for the staff, students and their families.



## LAS TÍAS | NICARAGUA

There is fear of political violence and unrest in Nicaragua as the elections approach this fall. This, coupled with the crushing impact of COVID on unemployment levels and food insecurity, makes the work Las Tías does to provide stability all the more critical. Las Tías has been operating a revolving fund for years, which provides microloans to local entrepreneurs and helps sustainably fund a few staff positions. With Spark's support, they have been able to grow the fund and will be serving a total of 130 individual borrowers, allowing them access to capital they need to grow their businesses and support their families. They have also been able to make some long-needed repairs, including significant plumbing work, and installation of new ceramic tiles in the dining area.



## ENTREAMIGOS | MEXICO

Entreamigos' Jungle Group program for at-risk youth had great successes despite the challenges this year presented: "With school being virtual the entire year and assignments given through text messages, many students were at risk of having to repeat the entire school year. We are thrilled to announce that the tutoring program that Spark supported helped every single student in the Jungle Group pass their grade. They are all ready for in-person classes to start next school year." Additionally, a new partnership with a local hotel, facilitated by a member of the Spark Board has provided an exciting new outlet for the handmade treasures that their women entrepreneurs create from recycled items. The hotel is now contracting the women entrepreneurs to make hundreds of handmade gifts each month!



## YOU'RE INVITED! 2021 VIRTUAL FALL GALA

STANDING STRONG

*October 28, 2021*

6:30 pm CDT – Artisanal Cheese Tasting

7 pm CDT – Virtual Gala

Our virtual program features the opportunity to hear from our partner organizations, a raffle, premium silent & live auction items & more! The funding raised at this annual event is critically important to our partners in Zambia, Nicaragua, Mexico and Chicago. Ticket purchases are not required for this event, however, a financial contribution of any amount is greatly appreciated.

Virtual guests have the option to purchase a home-delivered “Board At Home” charcuterie box filled with artisanal handmade cheeses and accompaniments that support local California dairy farmers impacted by COVID. Participants will be treated to an interactive and educational cheese tasting hosted by Ray Rumiano; fourth-generation owner of Rumiano Cheese Co.

More info and tickets here: [sparkventures.org/fallgala](https://sparkventures.org/fallgala)

**spark**ventures

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View this report online: [sparkventures.org/foundersreport](https://sparkventures.org/foundersreport)