

sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Fall 2021



CELEBRATING 14 YEARS OF IMPACT

A Note from Fall Gala Hosts, Jennifer Kim and Alyson Marguerat

One of the things we have both always loved about Spark Ventures is that by supporting this organization, you open a door to building personal connections with inspiring individuals from all walks of life. This comes in the form of peers in the amazing Spark Ventures community of supporters who inspire with their commitment and dedication. And, through cross-cultural connections made with people at our partner organizations around the globe.

While we all eagerly wait for the day when we can resume visits to our partners and continue to build these connections in-person, we are grateful for the opportunity to cultivate and nurture our community's connected-ness through other outlets - like the personal stories shared via video at our recent Fall Gala event.

It was a deep personal connection that grew from a trip to Zambia that launched Spark Ventures 14 years ago, and thanks to many more connections along the way (we have over 500 active donors today), this community has raised over \$8.5 million dollars in support of 4 partners around the world, serving collectively almost 800 beneficiaries each year.

The connections we have made together are powerful and we are grateful that you are a member of this community.

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Bringing connectivity to Englewood

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Maritza's story of impact

Record Breaking Fall Gala

The Spark Ventures community stands strong

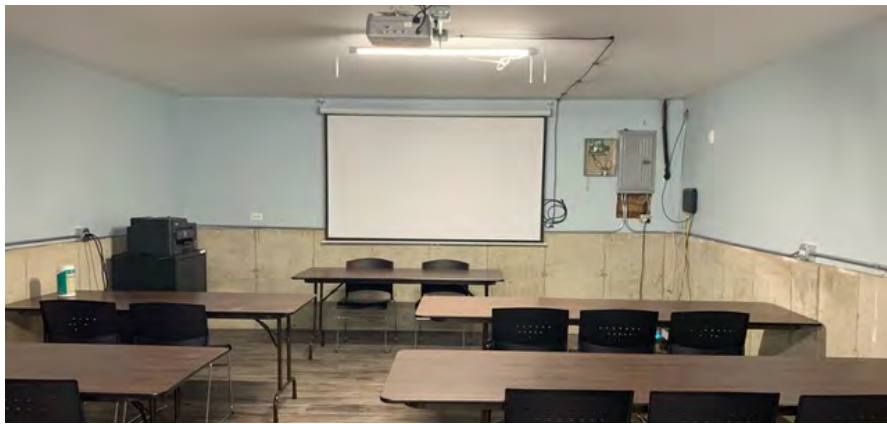
Spark Staff Update

Meet two new members of our small and mighty team

AND MORE...

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ENGLEWOOD

I Grow Chicago empowers local Englewood youth by providing educational & social-emotional support to help them grow from surviving to thriving. The shift to online learning caused by the pandemic disproportionately impacted students in I Grow's neighborhood where 70% of homes don't have an internet connection. To help bridge the barriers to virtual learning, Spark supported programming that provided in-person educational support with access to laptops and an internet connection while schools were closed.



Some Spark supporters recently collaborated with leaders at I Grow to bring more technology and internet access to the Peace Campus by creating a new computer lab. The lab provides a safe & welcoming space for students to receive educational support. It is also available for teens and adults in the neighborhood who are continuing their education or searching for employment. This productive space holds immense potential for all sorts of future programming for the community.

The computer lab came together thanks to the generosity of John Dewan, Sue Dewan, Paul Denzer & Sue Bernstein, along with some hardworking volunteers. Thanks to all who made this possible.



Dramatic technology investments have also been made at our Zambian partner, Hope Community School. A virtual "Math is Fun" tutoring program that was created to help 7th graders prepare for their national exam has expanded to include individualized tutoring for the 9th graders as well. This program is possible thanks to the generosity of Spark supporters who've provided funding for technology and dedicated their time & talent to tutoring. Head Teacher Ngoma has provided extremely positive feedback about the impact the program is having on the students, their math skills, their confidence, and their general technological literacy. Through collaboration with Hope's teachers, this program has helped students get back on track following months of being out of school due to COVID.

THE REVOLVING FUND: MICROLOANS THAT EMPOWER

The Las Tías Revolving Fund serves women looking to sustain and grow their small business so that they can provide a better future for themselves and their families. Spark Ventures recently provided additional support for this program, allowing Las Tías to increase the number of borrowers they can serve.

Attendees of our Fall Gala had the opportunity to meet Maritza, a 68 year old mother of 7 (and grandmother of 12) who has benefited from multiple loans from the Las Tías Revolving Fund. She shared how the access to capital has enabled her to expand what she sells at her stall in the market: "The fund makes very favorable loans. Before I had borrowed money at a 20% interest rate - Las Tías lends at just 3%. I am grateful for the revolving fund because I have been able to significantly grow my business. I have solid work and I can support my family." You can watch Maritza's full story on the Spark Ventures Facebook Page @SparkVentures.



The Las Tías Revolving Fund provides 130 individuals with economic support for their small businesses each year. A key requirement to participate in the fund is that the borrowers must commit to sending their children to school rather than enlisting them to help with the business - ensuring that children are receiving an education while their parents are able to support the families' needs.

The Revolving Fund aligns with the types of programs Spark Ventures funds because of the powerful sustainability component. Interest from the fund is supporting multiple salaries and side projects at Las Tias.



Our Fall Gala attendees also had the opportunity to meet additional beneficiaries from each of our partner organizations. Watch each of their personal testimonials of impact on our Facebook page @SparkVentures.



ELWIN

Entreamigos, Mexico

Hear how Elwin gained confidence in the Jungle Group program and improved his grades. He wants to be a Marine Biologist when he grows up!



JESSICA

Hope Community School, Zambia

Listen to a spirited message from Jessica, a captivating speaker and dedicated student. Her national exam score was the highest in the 7th grade last year.



KOURTNEY

I Grow Chicago, Chicago

Get a glimpse into the programming I Grow offered this summer through the eyes of one of their enthusiastic camp counselors.



Fall Gala

STANDING STRONG WAS A STRONG SUCCESS

Another Spark Ventures virtual event is in the books. As we shared at the event - despite the health & economic crisis caused by COVID, Spark and our partners are standing strong. Pivoting to virtual events was daunting, but your commitment didn't waver. Our virtual events exceeded our fundraising goals - which allowed us to provide uninterrupted funding for salaries and meal programming during shutdowns, additional support to battle COVID & severe levels of food insecurity, and funding for new programs. This Fall Gala continued that commitment - with almost 400 supporters in attendance, our community raised an impressive \$260,000. Sincere thanks to all who attended and helped make the event a huge success. You make our important work possible!

WELCOMING NEW SPARK VENTURES TEAM MEMBERS

Spark Ventures is able to provide sustainable solutions to lift communities out of poverty and empower future leaders because of our dedicated community of supporters and our small but mighty team. Spark's hardworking staff ensures your contributions are leveraged to make the most impact possible. We are thrilled to have recently welcomed two talented new individuals to the team:



LEXI LEWIS

Marketing Manager

Lexi joined Spark in October. She has a passion for travel and is thrilled to be a part of something larger than herself.



KATIE GUSTAFSON

Communications & Event Coordinator

Katie joined the team part-time in August and has recently stepped up to a full-time position. She loves being outside and learning new things.

Learn more about Lexi and Katie on the Spark team page: sparkventures.org/our-team

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