

# sparkventures

## FOUNDERS REPORT

Spring 2023



## ENGAGING IN NEW WAYS

A Note from Patti O'Neil, Spark Ventures Board Member

Offering opportunities to engage with our partners first-hand has always been a core part of how Spark Ventures has inspired our community. We are so grateful that we have been able to resume our Impact Travel. We have a packed roster for this summer's trips to Zambia and more exciting travel on the horizon. Have you checked out our Nicaragua trip in November? It's going to be amazing! The Tías are so eager to welcome the Spark family back to León.

We also have been thinking creatively about other ways to bring the direct engagement experiences that come with our partner trips to supporters who might not be able to join us on a full impact travel journey. Based on feedback from the Spark community following other virtual events, we have curated a new virtual experience called Pathways to Sustainability, featuring the Women's Entrepreneur program at Entreamigos in Mexico. An entrepreneur will share her story via Zoom and teach you how to make your very own artisan craft - giving you a glimpse into the programming at Entreamigos and the impact it has on women in the community. We sincerely hope you will be able to join us for this new event (more details on the back page of this report).

### INSIDE THIS EDITION...

#### Unity at We Grow Chicago

Celebrating Unity Day  
with the Englewood community

#### Zooming with Zambia Impact

Math exam scores show the powerful  
impact of our tutoring program

#### Welcoming New Board Member

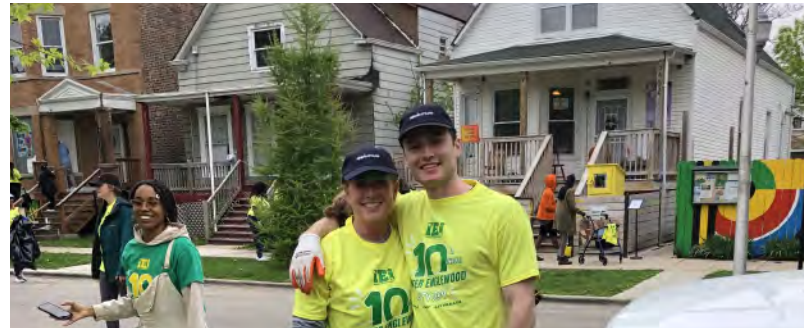
Leon Reed joins the Spark  
Ventures Board of Directors

AND MORE...



# UNITY AT WE GROW CHICAGO

Spark Supports Unity Day at We Grow Chicago and Exciting Additional Initiatives



## UNITY DAY

On May 6th, 24 members of the Spark Ventures community joined our partners at We Grow Chicago, along with many others from the Englewood neighborhood & the Chicago area for Unity Day - the largest community clean up in Chicago. Volunteers spread out across multiple sites to help beautify the Peace campus and surrounding blocks.

“Enlightened -- a good word to describe the way I felt after attending Unity Day at We Grow Chicago. While we worked to make the neighborhood a more beautiful place to live, work, and play, several people strolled by and greeted us with immense joy and appreciation. Simple improvements, like planting flowers and painting fences, seemed to change the spirits and hearts of the people in the community. These reactions were special to me. After the day's work was finished we celebrated; we dined, we sang, we danced, we laughed, we jumped rope, and we had a lot of fun. The community is made up of intelligent, creative, caring, passionate people who want a fair chance at the game of life. It is important that we capture images to tell the positive side of Englewood's story.”

- JASON KUKER, SPARK VENTURES ASSOCIATE BOARD MEMBER *(pictured above, bottom right image)*

## OTHER ONGOING INITIATIVES

Spark Ventures has also been deepening our support for other We Grow initiatives. This has most recently taken the form of continued support for the Spark Inspiration Computer Lab.

An example of a powerful program that the computer lab is enabling is the teen leadership program - Growing Citizens Leadership (GCL). GCL meets twice a week and the students involved are working to develop a youth-led fentanyl awareness campaign. The teens have learned about the history and harms of drugs in the black community, worked closely with data and research specialists to create and analyze their student-created survey, and are currently preparing the design and plan for their summer campaign launch.

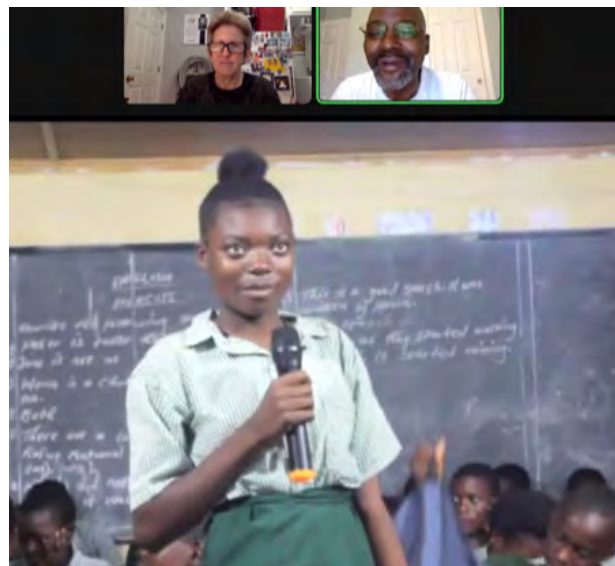


# POWERFUL IMPACT FROM AFAR

Yes, math IS fun! Our virtual tutoring program and other supplementary educational support initiatives prove to be powerful for young learners.

## MATH IS FUN YIELDS MEASURABLE RESULTS

Our virtual tutoring program “Zooming with Zambia” continues to go strong. The math tutoring initiative received incredibly positive feedback this past quarter when the results of last year’s national exams came in. Over 80% of the 9th graders passed the math section of the 2022 national exam - a significant leap from 44% in 2021. Hope’s 80% pass rate stood out in 9th grade math among the 120 schools in the Ndola district, where the average pass rate was 45% (the same as the national pass rate). The district performance for 7th grade math was 68% while Hope School had an impressive 100% pass rate. Head Teacher N’Goma believes that the “Math is Fun” program is making a “huge difference” for students at Hope.



## MENTAL HEALTH SESSIONS TEACH COPING STRATEGIES

Our efforts to supplement the Hope School Science curriculum continued with two sessions about Mental Health with Andi Jacobson, a licensed therapist who is a member of the Spark Associate Board and a Zambia travel alumni. Andi has met with grades 7 through 10, presenting programs that highlight what mental health is and what happens when someone is experiencing mental health problems. She spoke about unhealthy coping mechanisms and offered many suggestions for healthy ways to deal with these issues. The students at all levels were eager to take the microphone and share stories of their own anxiety or stress (taking tests, awaiting test results, fear of a relative dying, helping someone who drinks too much). They were eager to get advice from Andi. Andi anchors her sessions with deep breathing exercises, and shares online video links for teachers to use outside of her sessions.



## NEW SCIENCE EQUIPMENT

The budding scientists at Hope School are excited about the equipment recently purchased for the school’s new “Mobile Science Lab.” The teachers at Hope can tap into these tools to supplement their classroom STEM activities. We can’t wait to see the students continue their experiments and are thrilled about the possibilities these new resources offer.

**MORE EXCITING NEWS:** Thanks to the generous support of the Vallavbhai and Savitaben Patel Foundation, the John & Susan Dewan Foundation, and the Spark Ventures community, we are providing **95 Secondary School Scholarships** for Hope Community School students this year - the largest group of secondary students we’ve supported to date!

# THANK YOU WINE & DINE ATTENDEES!

Our successful event raised over \$220,000.

These funds will support our partner communities through microloans, capacity building through technology, educational & entrepreneurial opportunities, and more. Thank you to those of you who were able to raise a glass with us and toast to the incredible impact we're having together as we empower communities around the world.



## TWO EXCITING WAYS TO GET INVOLVED FIRST-HAND WITH OUR PARTNERS:



Join this **fully virtual event** for a first-hand experience with the Women's Entrepreneur program at Entreamigos in Mexico.

### PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

THURS, JUNE 29 | 5:30-6:30PM CT ON ZOOM

Register at [sparkventures.org/pathways](https://sparkventures.org/pathways)



Join an unforgettable **5-day journey** filled with meaningful engagement with community leaders and the beneficiaries at Las Tías in Nicaragua.

### NICARAGUA IMPACT TRAVEL Visit our partners at Asociación Las Tías

NOVEMBER 8-12, 2023

More info at [sparkventures.org/nicaragua-impact-travel](https://sparkventures.org/nicaragua-impact-travel)



## WELCOMING LEON REED TO THE SPARK VENTURES BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Leon is an experienced science & engineering professional, having worked as a key member of the High Energy Physics Division at Argonne National Lab. He has a passion for youth education. He has already lent his time and expertise to more than one of Spark Ventures' partner organizations. He volunteers weekly as a math tutor for our Zooming with Zambia program. And, bolstered by his own personal connection having grown up in Englewood, he has spent significant time engaging with We Grow Chicago - via attending community events and helping set up the "Spark Inspiration Computer Lab". He's eager to get involved with other programming on the Peace Campus. Welcome Leon!



PO Box 641004, Chicago, IL 60664 | 773.293.6710  
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