



sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Fall 2023

REFLECTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

A Note from Michael Campbell, Spark Ventures Board Chair

At our recent Fall Gala, I was able to share some of the many ways your contributions have an incredible impact on the lives of the beneficiaries at each of our partners. Some of the examples that stand out the most to me are:



INDIVIDUAL SUSTAINABILITY

Pathways to self-sufficiency are being created for over 1000 people each year through access to education & jobs in Chicago, Mexico, Nicaragua and Zambia, AND through access to nutrition, vocational programming, healthcare and microloans in Zambia & Nicaragua.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue-generating initiatives like the artisan craft gallery in Mexico and the farm in Zambia are contributing hundreds of dollars each month to support the long term financial health of our partners.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Upcycling, recycling, advocacy, and the use of renewable resources are contributing to environmental sustainability.

Together, we are making a profound impact on the lives of those in need, and together, we are building strong foundations and bright futures for our friends around the world.

With gratitude,

Michael H. Campbell

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

Vocational Training Graduates

How Spark is seeding small-scale entrepreneurship in Nicaragua

Computers Open New Opportunities

Examples bring to life how the Spark Inspiration Lab is serving Englewood

Strong Foundations & Bright Futures

Expressing gratitude for deeply committed supporters

NO AL TRABAJO INFANTIL, ¡SÍ A LA EDUCACIÓN!

Vocational programs in Nicaragua provide long-lasting benefits to entire families.

When you step into the classroom at one of the vocational programs offered at Las Tías, you find young adults and women from the community who are enthusiastic about learning new skills and building financial resilience. These future bakers, beauticians and carpenters are investing in their own futures AND the future of their families, a fact highlighted by Candida Mendez, Co-founder & Executive Director of Las Tías when she spoke at our recent Fall Gala.

Students take these vocational courses for anywhere from 6 months to multiple years. Once they are able to demonstrate mastery of their skills, they officially graduate from the program. Support from the Spark community has allowed Las Tías to purchase graduation gifts that reward hard work and help individuals leverage their new skills into income generating businesses - i.e. sewing machines for the sewing class graduates and carpentry tools for the woodworking graduates.



REPOSTERÍA | BAKING



COSMETOLOGÍA | COSMETOLOGY



CARPINTERÍA | CARPENTRY

In the vocational classes we offer, students learn skills that open up job opportunities and help entrepreneurs start their own businesses. Their income has a huge impact on financial and family sustainability, including a reduction in child labor as parents earn more and send their children to school. At Las Tías we say "no al trabajo infantil, ¡sí a la educación!" (no to child labor, yes to education!)

CANDIDA MENDEZ

Executive Director, Las Tías (Nicaragua)



COSTURA
SEWING



PIÑATA
PIÑATA MAKING



THE SPARK INSPIRATION LAB IN PRACTICE

We Grow Chicago's Peace Campus Director, Heavy Crownz, provides an update on how the computer lab is empowering West Englewood students.

In 2020, Spark Ventures & the Dewan Foundation partnered with We Grow Chicago to create the Spark Inspiration Lab which is fulfilling a long-time need in West Englewood. With more than 70% of residents without an internet connection in their homes, the computer lab opens up significant educational and job opportunities.

At our Fall Gala, we heard directly from Heavy Crownz, We Grow Chicago's Peace Campus Director, who shared specific examples on how the We Grow community is making use of the lab on a daily basis:

- Our partner Teamwork Englewood's parent mentor program uses the lab to facilitate computer skills training for parent volunteers.
- The "art of digital expression" program teaches teens how to navigate Google Suites through a creative & entrepreneurial lens to increase organization, productivity and overall professionalism. They also get hands-on experience with dj-ing and social media content creation.
- The lab is also an ever-evolving safe space for our all-boy BEARS book club that fosters a love of reading through brotherhood, connecting boys with male speakers who inspire them to build strong character and use reading to explore their imagination.

Programs like these empower students to chase their dreams and give them the tools to make their futures bright.



Everyday, I see the impact of our work. I've witnessed the expansion of personal goals and a greater willingness to contribute to the progress of the whole neighborhood. Thank you for helping We Grow Chicago empower our community! Please come visit the Peace Campus with Spark on May 4th for Unity Day! PEACE!

HEAVY CROWNZ

We Grow Chicago's Peace Campus Director

STRONG FOUNDATIONS & BRIGHT FUTURES

At our Fall Gala, we were honored to continue the tradition of inducting new members into our Founders' Circle - an award given to supporters who have achieved a significant lifetime giving milestone in contributions to our work.

In addition, this year we were pleased to add a new award category - the Strong Foundations Award. This award is given to recognize the commitment of foundations who have strengthened our impact and opened opportunities for hundreds of people.

The Fall Gala was a great success - with over 190 individuals in attendance, raising over \$315,000 to support the bright futures of students around the globe. Thank you to those of you who were able to join our event, both in-person and virtually.

FOUNDERS' CIRCLE AWARD

Bob & Chie Curley

Jennifer Kim & Ben Hellweg

Jennifer & Gregory Stephens

STRONG FOUNDATIONS AWARD

The John & Susan Dewan
Foundation

The Vallabhbai & Savitaben
Patel Foundation



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PO Box 641004, Chicago, IL 60664 | 773.293.6710
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