

sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Spring 2024



A SPARK DOUBLE HEADER

A Note from Jason Kuker, Spark Ventures Associate Board Chair

I've had a busy Spark Ventures schedule this spring. I wouldn't want it any other way. I, along with many of my fellow Associate Board members were thrilled to raise a glass together with 150 other Spark Ventures supporters at our recent Wine & Dine. Spark events never disappoint - from the first delicious bite of food to the last song of the DJ set (did you know our DJ was from the We Grow Chicago community?) the energy was amazing. But, the obvious highlights of the evening were the inspiring stories of impact from each partner - brought to us both virtually, and in-person by the absolutely impressive Teacher Ng'oma, joining us from Zambia and Martell, joining us from Englewood.

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

Teacher Ng'oma Multi-City Tour

Visiting both Chicago and Kansas City, Ng'oma returns home inspired

Unity Day Highlights

30 Spark volunteers (and many more from around Chicago) gathered for the 11th annual iteration of this community event

Meet Erika from Entreamigos

Read her story, and consider joining us to meet her in person next February

and more...



Less than a month later, another group of Spark Ventures community members gathered for Unity Day, where we rolled up our sleeves alongside our partners at We Grow and worked to beautify greater Englewood. Calling it the "The Largest Community Clean-Up in Chicago" really feels accurate. It was an enormous community effort - you could see the deep, grassroots connections the team at We Grow has. I love that I can now picture the We Grow space vividly when I hear updates about the Spark Inspiration Computer Lab. Our support there is being put to great use!

You'd think with these two major events on the docket this spring, there would be little else to report on, but this report holds more exciting updates. Read on!

TEACHER NG'OMA TOURS THE US

Head Teacher Ng'oma visited with educators and students in Chicago and Kansas City - sharing his knowledge & gaining insights to bring back to Hope School in Zambia

Head Teacher Ng'oma was one of the featured speakers at our recent Wine & Dine, but his visit to the US was so much more than a one night engagement! This was made possible thanks to the classroom exchange groundwork laid by many US educators who joined last year's Zambia Impact Travel Experience, and to comprehensive coordination by Spark Board Member, Sue Bernstein.

Ng'oma observed classrooms from preschool up to a high school business and entrepreneurship elective. He saw how teachers are using technology - an area of huge opportunity for Hope School now that classrooms have been equipped with projectors and teachers have access to chromebooks. He particularly noted how US teachers set out clear objectives for their students at the beginning of a lesson - something he would like to see Hope teachers do more of. He met and presented to more than 16 classrooms of students across 6 different schools, spreading awareness and cross-cultural connections (many of these classrooms are in active penpal/Zooming relationships with classrooms in Zambia). He met with an ESL teacher who shared insights for educating students in a second language (very translatable skills for students in Zambia who learn in English while speaking Bemba at home and in their communities). AND he still had time to enjoy some cultural highlights in the US... and lots of new food.



Teacher Ng'oma has returned to Zambia, but this exchange will continue. Many of the educators Ng'oma met with will engage with Hope's team through continuing educational exchanges on Zoom, sharing their insights and expertise for the Hope teachers to implement in their classrooms. Plus, some are joining us in Zambia this July. Ng'oma built a foundation for much more engagement to come!



A VIBRANT DAY OF UNITY

We Grow Chicago's 11th Annual Unity Day brought Spark Ventures volunteers together with the greater Englewood community for a day of service - and a lot of paint!

The mood at this year's Unity Day was light and fun. With beautiful weather and many cans of vibrant colored paint, the Spark Ventures team of volunteers took on a few of the blank fences in the neighborhood and left a beautiful mark on the community. The busy Spark hands were part of a much broader community effort that spanned across many of the blocks surrounding our Englewood partner - We Grow Chicago.

This annual clean-up effort is a tangible way for the We Grow community and volunteers from around Chicago to collaborate, recognize and elevate the beauty of Englewood. Everyone deserves to live in a neighborhood they can take pride in, and thanks to the clean-up and beautification efforts, Englewood community members get to enjoy their neighborhood more fully.

"We had a great experience. I'm very pleased with our work. It was good to brighten up the neighborhood!" said Arnold Duijzer at the end of the day. Associate Board Member, Aneil Baron was also enthusiastic about the fruits of their labor: "Seeing the before and after, I mean, it's incredible!"

While there, Spark volunteers were also treated to a tour of We Grow's Peace Campus and got to see features like the Spark Inspiration Computer Lab where access to technology is broadening opportunities for young and old in the community.

The Spark contingent of volunteers has grown each of the years we have participated in this energizing day - we hope to see YOU at the 12th Annual Unity Day in 2025!



MEET ERIKA:

A WOMEN'S GROUP LEADER AT ENTREAMIGOS

Read her inspiring story here, meet her in-person next February

At our April Wine & Dine we were honored to feature Erika's story about how the Women's Group at Entreamigos has influenced her.

"I'm Erika Yesenia Rodriguez Ramirez, a mother to three beautiful children. Eight years ago, I joined Entreamigos. At first I felt shy and didn't always speak my mind. Looking back, I can see that one of the biggest impacts of being in the Women's Group was an improvement in my communication skills. I have big plans for my future. I want to continue my education and eventually graduate from high school. My dream is to be the independent owner of a beauty salon that I can run from inside my home. I've grown into a more confident woman, and feel continually motivated to chase my dreams."



We're already looking forward to our impact trip to Mexico in February of 2025. On that journey you can meet Erika, and many other women entrepreneurs served by life-changing programming. The 4-day trip absolutely packs in highlights of the San Pancho community - with culinary features like delicious meals made with locally sourced ingredients and a special ceviche lunch; relaxation and natural beauty; and, a good time spent giggling and playing with the always energetic youth in the Jungle Group program. You will return home invigorated and inspired. Carve out February 6-9, 2025 on your calendar NOW and register today to secure your spot. Visit sparkventures.org/travel to learn more.

SAVE THESE IMPORTANT SPARK DATES!

October 17, 2024 | Fall Gala, Chicago

November 6-10, 2024 | Nicaragua: Impact Travel Experience

February 6-9, 2025 | Mexico: Impact Travel Experience

July 13-22, 2025 | Zambia: Impact Travel Experience

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208 S. LaSalle St., #1670, Chicago IL 60604 | 773.293.6710

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