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Spring Forward event

SPRING FORWARD INTO ACTION

Spring is a season of growth, renewal, and new beginnings. Over the past few months, we've seen that spirit come to life in inspiring ways across our partner organizations. In classrooms and community spaces around the world, true transformation is taking place. Through access to education, technology, food security, counseling services, skill-building programs, and employment opportunities - students are thriving, communities are stronger, entrepreneurs are building livelihoods, and local businesses are generating income. This is the impact of investing in long-term, sustainable solutions that empower communities to create lasting change.

The outpouring of support from the Spark community at last month's Spring Forward event is helping sustain life-changing programming in Chicago, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Zambia. That support is being translated into action - removing barriers, uplifting communities, and empowering the people who live in them. We are deeply inspired by the leaders in our partner communities who drive this work each day.

We invite you to read this report to learn more about the incredible progress taking place. Inside, you'll find stories of resilience and growth, along with examples of the meaningful impact your support is making possible. Thank you for being part of this global community and for helping create opportunities that continue to build pathways to brighter futures.

With gratitude,
Kristin Hallee Schrepferman
Executive Director, Spark Ventures



*Kristin on right, pictured with
Spark Board Member, Jennifer Kim*

A HISTORIC MILESTONE IN ZAMBIA

From Secondary School Graduation to University



At Spark Ventures, our work is rooted in long-term partnerships. One of the most powerful examples of that commitment is unfolding at **Hope Community School** in Zambia.

Following the school's first-ever secondary school graduation, students are now stepping into their next chapter - continuing their education at the university level. After receiving their national exam results, students quickly completed applications, attended orientation, and began classes within days, a powerful demonstration of what happens when preparation meets access.



Charles Mumba on right, pictured with Co-Founder and wife Margaret Mumba

"Hope has grown in remarkable ways, not just in numbers, but in opportunity. Expanded programming like technology access, a full secondary school, local revenue initiatives, and outstanding academic achievement are changing lives every day.

We have reached a historic milestone. Hope recently celebrated our first grade 12 graduation. Six of those graduates have enrolled in Northrise University, a monumental achievement for our students, school and the entire community.

This is more than progress, it's true transformation."

Charles Mumba, Hope Community School Executive Director

Northrise is a top-ranked institution located just across the road from Hope. The proximity of the university allows the Hope community to continue supporting and encouraging these new university students. The "Freshers" return to Hope's campus most afternoons to use computers, complete assignments and seek advice from staff, including an intern who is a recent Northrise University graduate.

These students are not only continuing their education, they're stepping into opportunities that will open doors to meaningful careers, financial stability, and leadership. For many of them, this path once felt out of reach. Today, it is a reality made possible through a long-standing partnership and years of consistent investment in education, nutrition, healthcare, and community support.



EMPOWERING WOMEN | NICARAGUA

Building confidence through knowledge, leadership, & teamwork

Las Tías was founded in 1989 by eight business women, and is still women-led today. They remain deeply rooted in the belief that every girl deserves safety, dignity, and opportunity.

In Nicaragua, many women face gender-based violence and high rates of teen pregnancy - challenges that often limit education and long-term economic independence. Through comprehensive education, workshops on women's rights, personalized and group counseling, and vocational training, Las Tías equips women with knowledge, skills, and confidence. Just as importantly, it creates a safe space where girls are encouraged to find their voice, lead, and envision new possibilities for their future.

Las Tías celebrated International Women's Day this spring, however, every day is a celebration of girls and women in their community.



CLEAN ENERGY, DEEPER IMPACT | MEXICO

Harnessing solar power to sustain operations & the environment



Entreamigos creates opportunities for children and families through three foundational pillars: education for all, environmental stewardship, and the power of community. Their 16,000-square-foot community center is home to educational programs, entrepreneurial workshops, and environmental initiatives.



Thanks to a generous gift from the John & Susan Dewan Foundation, Entreamigos has expanded its solar panel system, which now powers a significant portion of the electricity used for daily operations. By generating clean, renewable energy on-site, they have reduced their dependence on conventional electricity and lowered operating costs, freeing up more resources for the programs that matter most to local children, women, and families.

COMMUNITY IN ACTION | CHICAGO

13th Annual Unity Day - a day of connection, collaboration & celebration

At **We Grow Chicago's** Peace Campus, Imagine Englewood If hosted its 13th annual Unity Day, bringing together hundreds of volunteers from the neighborhood and across Chicagoland to make West Englewood a more beautiful place to live, work, and play. The energy on the ground reflected what Unity Day is all about: a community celebrating collaboration with strength, power and love.

Thirty Spark volunteers spent the day painting, gardening, and cleaning up around the neighborhood - then celebrated with the community over a cookout, dancing, and good company. At the end of an amazing day, Spark was honored to receive the "Champion Award" for extraordinary leadership and service. We're so grateful to be part of such a meaningful day and are looking forward to next year's Unity Day.



Associate Board member Ashley Bailey at Unity Day 2026

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

The Spark community sprang into action at our Spring Forward event last month, raising over \$150,000! We were honored to hear from Spark Associate Board members, Mac & Avery, who shared how visiting Spark's partners has impacted their lives, as well as from leaders and rising stars in our partner communities. Below are excerpts from their remarks:



"I've had the opportunity to visit Spark's partners several times with my family. What I've loved most is the connection, camaraderie and sense of purpose - building real relationships, working side-by-side, and experiencing the joy of doing something meaningful together. Honestly, I wouldn't be who I am today without these experiences. They've shaped my entire worldview and allowed me to understand connection, compassion and love on a much deeper level."
-Mac Wolf | Spark Associate Board Member (on right)



"I've been lucky enough to visit all of Spark's partners with my family and have witnessed their incredible work. These experiences have become such a meaningful part of my life and have shaped who I am today. What makes them so special is the true spark you feel when you connect with those around you. They are a unique opportunity to engage on a level that builds relationships, immerses you in new cultures and broadens perspectives. Once you do visit...you'll understand why our partners mean so much to all of us."
-Avery Hellweg | Spark Associate Board Member



"Hope has made a big difference in my life. We have hardworking teachers who encourage learners to believe in ourselves. We have things that many schools do not have, like computers, a library, and a school counselor. I've learned how to read, write and even use a computer - something I never imagined I'd learn. Meals are always provided, and there are people who always support us. Hope is helping me grow, learn, and become a better person."

Regina | 6th Grader, Hope Community School, Zambia



"My life changed when I joined Las Tías. I improved my grades, learned about nutrition, sexual education, addiction prevention, decision-making, and how to love myself. Nowadays, there is a lot of violence against women in my community. My favorite workshop was learning about our rights. Today, I feel prepared to graduate, continue my education, and pursue my dream of becoming a doctor. Empowerment gives girls like me the strength, tools, courage, and confidence to overcome obstacles and dream big."

Yaoska | 16 Year-Old Student, Las Tías, Nicaragua



"In 2025, we made 485 deliveries, providing over 4,500 meals and 5,000 essential items to our neighbors - many are elders who appreciate the support, a smile and a moment of connection. This is what it looks like to spring into action. It's about showing up, consistency and making sure people know they're not forgotten. Englewood Strong is more than a community resource program. It's a commitment to meeting people where they are and walking alongside them with care and dignity - strengthening Englewood into a place where families feel safe and young people have space to grow."

Bartholomew | IEI Program Coordinator, We Grow Chicago



"When I joined the scholarship program, I got into conflicts with my classmates. In my classes we talk about self-esteem, confidence, and what it means to think before reacting. My teachers listen to me and are patient with me. Now, if I feel upset, I can see my emotions more clearly and I try to understand others' emotions too. The program has given me empathy, friends and love. It has helped me grow, not just as a student, but as a person with emotions."

Esahú | 10 Year-Old Student, Entreamigos, Mexico



Join Us in Mexico | November 5-8, 2026

At Entreamigos there is a saying: "Everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn." This spirit comes alive on our 4-day immersive journey to San Pancho, packed with deeply meaningful time connecting with women entrepreneurs and students in the scholarship program. Check out the full itinerary at sparkventures.org/travel.

Save the Date

Fall Gala, October 15, 2026

Same great event, new location! Our annual Fall Gala will take place at the Dalcy this fall, bringing together the Spark community to celebrate our partners' impact and look ahead to what's next.