30% of U.S. students drop out of high school, with dropout rates exceeding 50% in poor urban communities. Spark addresses the dropout crisis with life-changing apprenticeships for middle school students in underserved communities. The Spark experience creates a powerful sense of relevance for students, while providing the skills and confidence necessary for them to find success in school and in life.

Spark matches students with a professional volunteer mentor in their “dream” career. Students gain professional and life experience working alongside their mentor, and gain a tangible appreciation for the value of education. Students also take part in a Leadership Class, focused on critical life skills such as financial literacy, networking, and resume writing. By providing participants with an appreciation for the relevance of their education and the motivation to become self-directed learners, Spark empowers students to succeed in their education and beyond. Spark currently serves 7th and 8th grade students in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Chicago.
Dear Friends,

2010 was a transformative year for Spark. After five years of learning how to create high-impact apprenticeships through our work in the Bay Area, we took our first steps toward addressing the dropout crisis on a national scale. In January 2010, we were serving two Bay Area cities; by year’s end we had opened a vibrant program in Los Angeles, staffed with a local Spark team, and laid the groundwork for our Chicago office, making Illinois the second state where Spark offers one-on-one apprenticeships for middle-school youth. We increased our student enrollment by 49%, creating 305 unique apprenticeships, while only increasing expenses by 7%, even including the geographic growth – a real testament to the thousands of volunteer hours that power our work.

More than anything else, I want to express my own and our team’s deepest appreciation for everyone who made this possible. From the passionate mentors who open their workplaces and generously volunteer their time, to the donors whose philanthropic spirit and vision for youth supports our daily work, to the students who inspire our determination and hope – thank you.

Many of my proudest moments this year were in visiting apprenticeships, talking with the students and mentors whose daily connection is the heart of our work. I visited a student named Tania, in San Francisco. Her story is typical of many of the students we serve. No one in her family had completed high school. In seventh grade, she was struggling academically, and assumed that she would follow in her mother’s footsteps and become a cashier at Wal-Mart. At school, Tania had not been asked much about her aspirations – as it turns out, she dreamed of becoming an attorney – and as a result she did not clearly understand how school could ever get her to that goal.

Like so many students, Tania was in danger of lowering her aspirations at a very early age. It’s a classic path to dropping out. As a 2006 Gates Foundation study pointed out, 47% of dropouts said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. In other words, school seemed irrelevant to their lives.

Spark matched Tania with a lawyer, Erik, who had volunteered to be a mentor. Each Thursday afternoon last Spring, Tania went to Erik’s office downtown. At first their conversations had little to do with the law, as they talked more broadly about college, work, and about the different paths that were available to Tania if she applied herself in school. They corrected some assumptions, like Tania’s belief that college was not a real option for her simply because no one in her family had attended. By the end of the semester, Tania had designed and acted out a mock trial, which she performed for her peers at school. More importantly, she had aspirations that now felt tangible: she is now determined to work hard in school in order to get into college, then law school, and eventually realize her dream of becoming a lawyer. Through her experience with Erik, Tania discovered just how much of a difference applying herself in school could make.

When I met Tania, I could see the excitement she had for her future, and the new clarity she felt for how school connects her to that future vision. I think all students deserve this opportunity, and I hope you’ll join us in making this possible through Spark.

Chris Balme, Co-Founder & Executive Director
Spark Alumna Nancy Orocio, named "Youth of the Year" by the Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula
“Every week, Ariana continued to surprise me with her curiosity, her ability, her imagination, and the trust building between us. On her first day, I told Ariana that every writer has to find his or her voice. What I love most about Ariana is that she has helped me find mine.”
- Toby Herman, Spark Mentor and Writer for The George Lopez Show

An Innovative Solution

During their time as middle school teachers, co-founders Chris Balme and Melia Dicker witnessed firsthand a disturbing trend: More than half of the young people in many urban communities were dropping out of high school. Today’s workforce requires higher levels of education than ever before, and lacking a high school diploma condemns most dropouts to a lifetime of poverty. Dropouts are much more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, incarcerated, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006).

Balme and Dicker felt that this crisis needed to be addressed early—in middle school—with an approach that engaged students who were losing interest in school. They saw that students eagerly engaged with learning when provided with active, collaborative, and personally relevant projects, and believed that professional workplaces could serve as fertile ground for this kind of learning. They launched Spark’s unique apprenticeship model in Redwood City in 2005, expanded into San Francisco in 2008, and began programming in San Rafael in Fall 2010.

The organization launched its first site outside the Bay Area in Los Angeles in Spring 2010, the first step toward a national program, and activity is underway for a launch in Chicago in Fall 2011. Spark has created over 700 apprenticeships across all sites, and plans to create an additional 500 this year. In the long term, both through direct service and by building a compelling policy case for the power of apprenticeships in middle school, Spark aims to impact the dropout crisis on a national scale.

To track student success, Spark has established data-sharing partnerships with schools to determine retention and graduation rates in high school. Spark also administers comprehensive post-program surveys to gather student, parent, and mentor feedback on improvements in student skills and behavior. To measure success in achieving enrollment and mentor recruitment goals, staff compiles data on the number of students enrolled each session, the status of their apprenticeships, student attendance, retention rate, number of mentors recruited, and number of community partnerships established, among other process metrics.

Data from Spark’s first alumni longitudinal study reveals that 56 of 57 of the first Spark students are currently enrolled in high school, equivalent to a 98.2% retention rate, and substantially higher than the expected retention rate for students with equivalent demographic factors. While this study is small, due to the size of Spark’s initial cohorts, it indicates a very positive trajectory and will be further studied as greater numbers of Spark students progress through the education system. In addition, post-program surveys completed by students, mentors, and parents consistently show strong results, particularly with significant gains in students’ confidence, communication skills, and professional development.

In recognition of its innovative and scalable approach to addressing the dropout crisis, Spark received the Draper Richards Fellowship in 2008 and the internationally renowned Ashoka Fellowship in 2010.

“My Spark apprenticeship was an amazing experience. It was one of the biggest things I would look forward to each week. Besides all the new stuff I was learning, I learned that this is also going to help me learn leadership skills and what my dream job might be like. Spark is a life-changing experience.”
- Joseph, Biomedical Research Apprenticeship at UCSF
Spark Students Meet the Dalai Lama

On October 13, 2010, the Dalai Lama visited Costaño Elementary School in East Palo Alto to spend time with teenagers from the Peninsula, including four Spark alumni and nine current Spark students. In preparation for this unique opportunity, students drafted questions to pose to His Holiness. Of the over 400 students in attendance, 11 were selected to read their questions out loud, including Spark alum David Montenegro. David presented the Dalai Lama with a profound question: “Given human nature, is world peace really attainable?” This event presented a cohort of Spark students with the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear this world leader speak on a range of topics, from memories of his teenage years to the impact of technology on society.

Spark in Chicago

Spark is excited to pilot its first programs outside of California, with a Fall 2011 launch in Chicago in partnership with Chicago Public Schools. With founding support from the Finnegan Foundation and several other Chicago donors, Spark is now well underway to establishing Chicago’s first-ever middle-school apprenticeship program. Spark Chicago will be led by Sarah Mayeda, who comes to Spark with deep experience in Chicago’s education system, where she started as a middle-school teacher and most recently managed program investments at The Chicago Public Education Fund.
Spark in the News

This November, Spark received its first national press recognition with a feature article in The Christian Science Monitor’s “Making a Difference” section. The Monitor spent several weeks interviewing Spark staff, Board members, supporters, parents, students, and partners, and observing key elements of Spark’s program. We are so excited to share this wonderful portrayal of Spark’s mission, and hope that it will increase exposure to our work. For the full article, visit: http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/2010/1108/Matching-kids-with-adults-who-live-their-dream

- **NBC Bay Area: Indulge in Sugar for Kids**
  NBC Bay Area announces Spark’s Bay Area Sugar Rush event, in which guests can indulge in desserts from some of the area’s best chefs and restaurants, all for a wonderful cause. Full article: http://www.nbcbayarea.com/the-scene/events/Indulge-in-Sugar-for-the-Kids-105882808.html

- **ABC 7Live TV**
  Host Brian Copeland engages viewers in real-time, candid conversations about the people and things making news in the Bay Area, including a plug about Spark’s volunteer mentorship opportunities on the March 11th broadcast. Full episode: http://7liveonline.com/episodes/Watch-the-full-show-or-individual-segments-from-the-March-11-2011-7Live-show./8012695

- **Philanthroper: What’s your dream job?**
  Philanthroper takes a unique spin on the daily deal trend, sharing a new 501(c)3 nonprofit every day rather than selling a product. Philanthroper chose to feature Spark’s work with at-risk youth this March. Full article: https://philanthroper.com/deals/spark

- **NoDropouts.com: Sparking a Lasting Change - Dropout Prevention through Meaningful Mentorship**
  NoDropouts.com believes that no child is a lost cause. This site brings together top thought leaders in education to share their thoughts on the dropout crisis. Spark Executive Director Chris Balme reflects his thoughts in this February 2011 feature. Full post: http://www.nodropouts.org/blog/sparking-lasting-change-dropout-prevention-through-meaningful-mentorship
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<th>Ordinary Income/Expense</th>
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<th>2009</th>
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<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<td>Fundraising</td>
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<td>Marketing &amp; Outreach</td>
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**TOTAL NET ORDINARY INCOME**

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<td>Net other income</td>
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**NET INCOME**

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* Net Income is carried over to the next year’s programs, and refers largely to funds raised at the end of 2010 for 2011 programs.
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Marina Pol-Longo: Consultant, FSG Social Impact Advisors

Additional members pending
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Co-Founder & Executive Director

Jon Spack  
Chief Operating Officer

Julie McGuire  
Development Director

National Team

Katie Krummeck  
Program Operations Specialist

Allison Dusine  
Grants Manager

Sarah Schramm  
Development & Communications Manager

Nathalie Wade  
Apprenticeship Operations Specialist

Bay Area Team

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Program Manager

Lauren Banister  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Alex Barnett  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Jen Bloomer  
Program Director

Sara Draffin  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Lupita Rodriguez  
Program Manager

LA Team

Ben Allen  
LA Managing Director

Laurie Bailon  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Nurjahan Boulden  
Program Manager

Kristen Torres  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Rebecca Velasco  
Americorps VISTA Outreach Coordinator

Chicago Team

Sarah Mayeda  
Chicago Managing Director
Spark provides life-changing apprenticeships for youth in underserved communities across the United States

SPARK STUDENTS REFLECTIONS

Thanks to Spark, I have learned...

…to think for myself.
…how to achieve goals by breaking them into small steps.
…how to save money.
…how to work with a group.
…how important it is to respect people.
…how to plan ahead.
…that you should be assertive.
…that I like to help people.
…that I have certain rights as an American.
…that if you don’t agree with someone you can always find a way to disagree respectfully.
…that going to college is a great path for me in the future.
…that working hard can get me into different places.
…that I can get a good job and have fun at the same time.
…that credit cards can be good or bad.
…about the meaning of consensus.
…about personal vision.
…about different types of communication.
…to look people in the eyes.

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Camino Nuevo Charter Academy - Burlington
John Adams Middle School
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Redwood City
Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula at Hoover Community School
Garfield School

San Rafael
E3 at Davidson Middle School

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San Francisco, CA 94103

To learn more about Spark, visit www.sparkprogram.org