



Strong, Prepared And Ready for Kindergarten

10 Years and Counting



Fox Valley United Way

2012-2022

2012

With committed partners throughout Aurora, SPARK emerged to bring together Aurora's vital early childhood community.

To ensure authentic parent voice and participation, SPARK created their first Parent Advisory Board.



2013

SPARK launched Gateways to Early Childhood Programs, a simplified, single point of entry for families to access and enroll in early childhood programs.



2014

SPARK began offering free developmental screenings to all children birth to five years old.



2015

Preschool for All Expansion Grant opened 21 full-day four-year old classrooms.



2016

Launched **Play.Learn.Connect.** as a community-wide outreach and engagement strategy.



2017

Funding supports the addition of another bilingual Family Engagement Coordinator.

2018

Partnered with VNA Health Care to transform their Women Infant Children (WIC) waiting room into a **Play.Learn.Connect.** Family Resource Center.



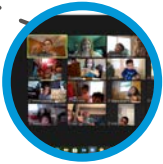
2019

Aurora is chosen as a Playful Learning Community and installations are now at Hesed House and Marie Wilkinson Community Garden.



2020

In response to the pandemic, SPARK created a virtual platform to support and engage with families.



2022 & Beyond

Looking into the future, SPARK will deepen its engagement with families and continue to raise awareness in the community about the importance of early learning.



There are only 2,000 days from birth until a child enters kindergarten. SPARK is committed to ensuring that all young children enter school

Strong, Prepared And Ready of Kindergarten.

2021

Community Parenting Saturation Support Program strengthens and deepens SPARK's parent engagement supports and strategies.



Bright By Text messaging system is launched to improve communication and outreach to parents.

Who We Are

SPARK Early Childhood Collaboration was created in 2012 as the result of community concerns that reflected the challenges facing Aurora families through socioeconomic, racial, and cultural barriers and the lack of authentic parent voices involved in addressing these challenges.

As an education initiative of Fox Valley United Way, SPARK brings together community leaders, school districts, early childhood programs, and community agencies to work collaboratively to build an early childhood system that will ultimately improve outcomes for Aurora's children.

SPARK is committed to empowering its community's diverse families and children to attain full success in learning and life by ensuring all young children have equitable access to exemplary Early Childhood Care and Education.

SPARK works in collaboration with committed agency partners and community stakeholders to:

- Ensure families are aware of the importance of early learning and connecting them with programs and services
- Coordinate efforts among the school districts' early childhood programs, Head Start, child care providers, and other early learning programs to maximize both impact and efficiency
- Support quality improvement in early childhood education and care programs in Aurora
- Support the expansion of formal and informal early learning opportunities in Aurora



THE SPARK EQUATION

for successful collaboration

**Leverage
Resources**

**WE LEVERAGE RESOURCES
AND SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES
THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE
FRAMEWORK**

+

**Build
Capacity**

**WE BUILD CAPACITY TO
REACH THE SHARED
CAPACITY GOAL THROUGH
A COLLABORATIVE
FRAMEWORK**

+

**Work
Effectively**

**WE COORDINATE EFFORTS
TO SUPPORT EFFICIENCIES
AND ACHIEVE GREATER
IMPACT FOR FAMILIES AND
CHILDREN**

=

**Positive
Outcomes**

**RESULTING IN POSITIVE
OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES
AND THEIR CHILDREN**

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What We Do



Play.Learn.Connect. (PLC)

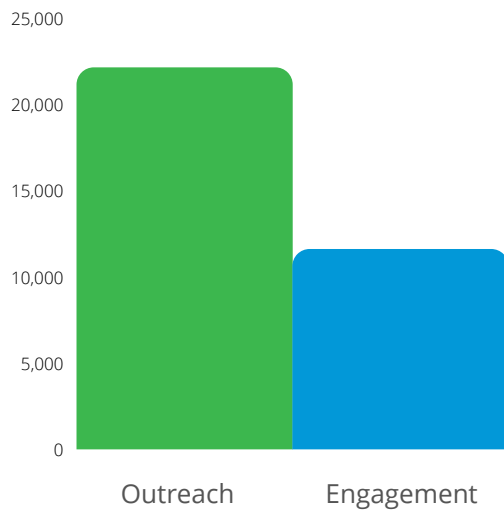
Our PLC initiative changes the model for typical community outreach and engagement. This initiative **meets families where they are**, in their own neighborhood by partnering with local churches, and community centers to host **Play.Learn.Connect.** events. At a PLC event, families have the opportunity to:

Play: Parents and children will engage in a fun and interactive learning experience.

Learn: Participate in parent workshops and cafes that support and strengthen their role as their child's first teacher to ensure that their child is successful in school and life.

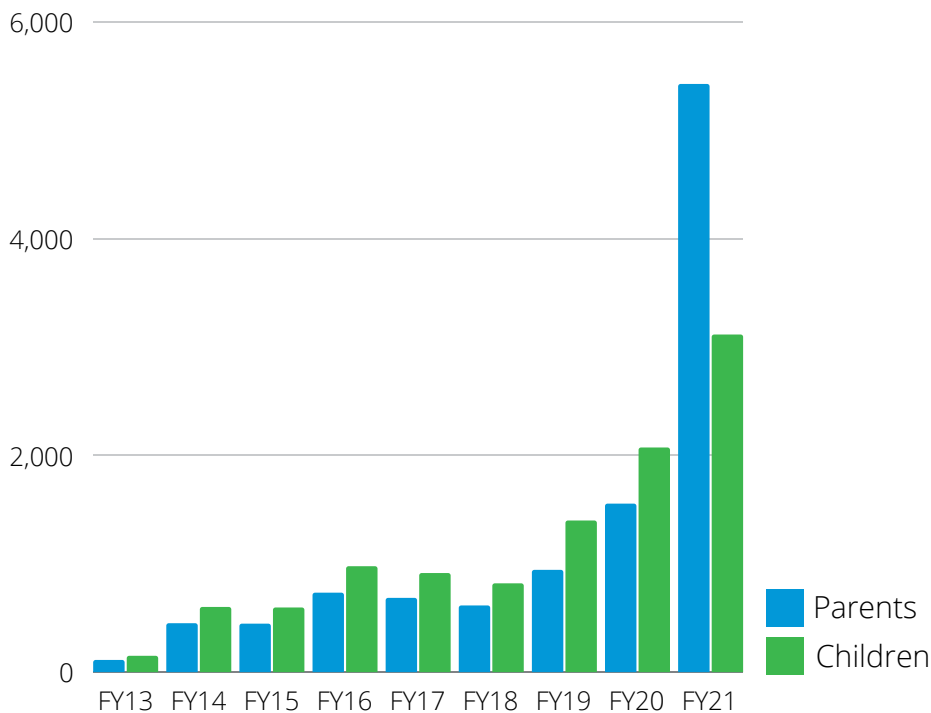
Connect: Early childhood programs and community agencies participate to increase families' awareness and connect them to programs and resources in Aurora.

Families Positively Impacted



Outreach: Being out in the community, engaging with families, ensuring they are aware of the importance of early learning and connecting them to early childhood programs and community resources to strengthen and support their family and child(ren).

Engagement: Working with families one-on-one connecting them to early childhood programs and community resources.



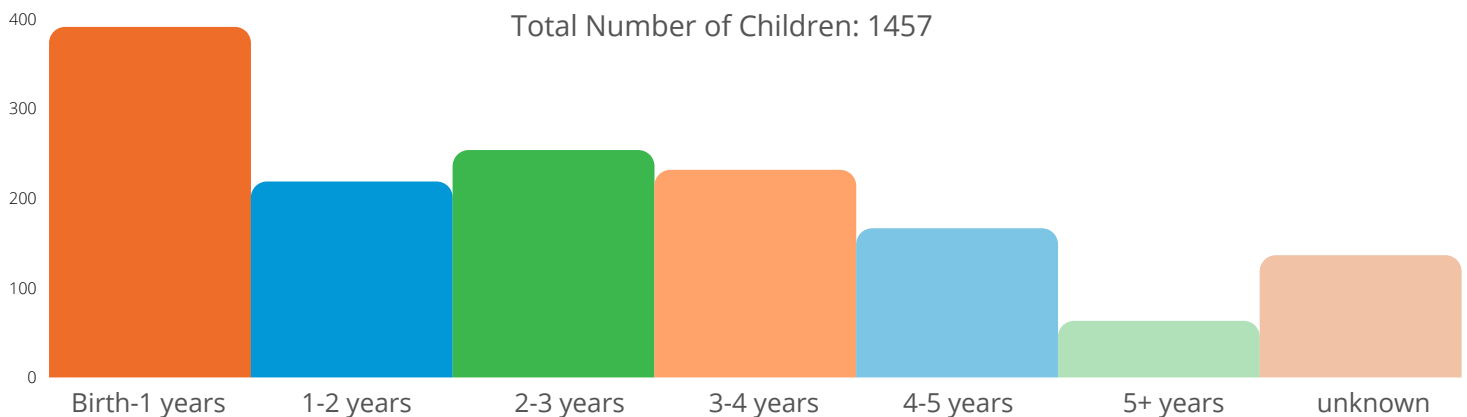
SPARK has positively impacted over 10,000 families, **empowering parents as a child's first and most important teacher**. They have helped 11,672 children thrive by ensuring all families have what they need for a child to **succeed in school and life.**

Gateway to Early Childhood Programs

SPARK's Gateway to Early Childhood Programs was developed and launched in response to the complicated process families experience and must navigate to enroll their child in early childhood education programs.

Serving as a **single point of entry for a family to access the vital early childhood programs and resources**, Gateway Family Interviews breaks down barriers for families and their children to have their best start in life. SPARK Family Engagement Coordinators refer, connect and advocate for families to access and enroll in early childhood programs and resources.

SPARK believes that a wholistic approach is necessary to ensure a family has everything they need for a child to be **Strong, Prepared And Ready for Kindergarten**.



Referrals

SPARK has conducted 1,056 family interviews, with a combined 1457 children, through our Gateway to Early Childhood Programs, **connecting hundreds of children to vital resources** in our community. Ensuring all children have what they need to thrive and be **Strong, Prepared And Ready for Kindergarten**.



Where we refer families

Child Care Assistance Program | Healthy Families | Parents as Teachers | Preschool for All | Head Start | Early Head Start | Early Intervention | Community Based Early Childhood Programs | Kindergarten

What Families Say About



With my 2 year old, I did a developmental screening and she was not in need of any additional services. However, I was offered the opportunity to come to the Friday play groups. During the pandemic we didn't go out many places and she became fearful of many situations. Now she is learning to interact with other kids and is not afraid of other adults. She is so much more outgoing and tries new things. SPARK has helped her connect to other kids and has given us materials to take home to use to interact with our children.

-Deneb

We just wanted to talk about how much we like SPARK, they helped bring 24 little libraries to the community. Little libraries help kids learn to read and having little libraries all over the place helps reading because you can read anywhere you go.

-Chuck & his daughter, Tess

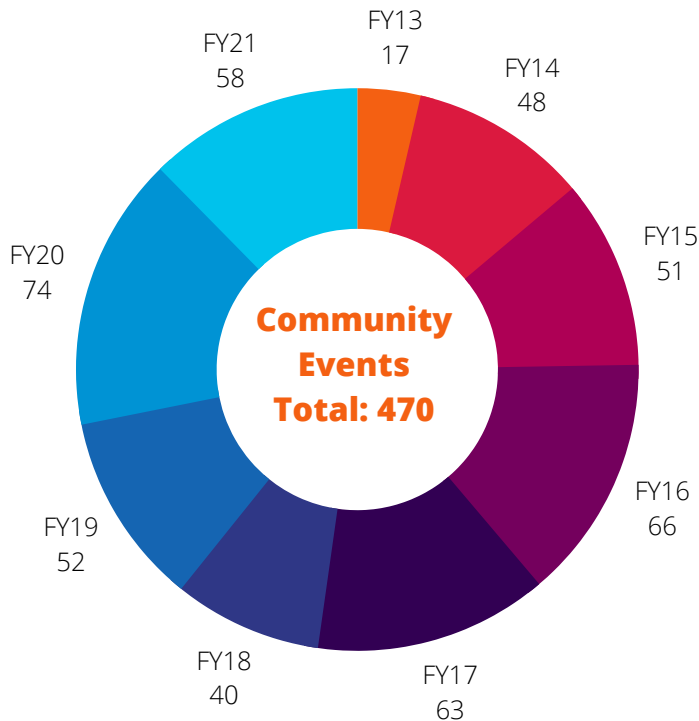
I have been a parent ambassador for a little over three years working with the programs SPARK has available and the resources they bring into the community for children birth to five years old. I was born and raised in Aurora and I am a community girl, this is my way to pay back the community.

-Parent Ambassador Samantha Olivas





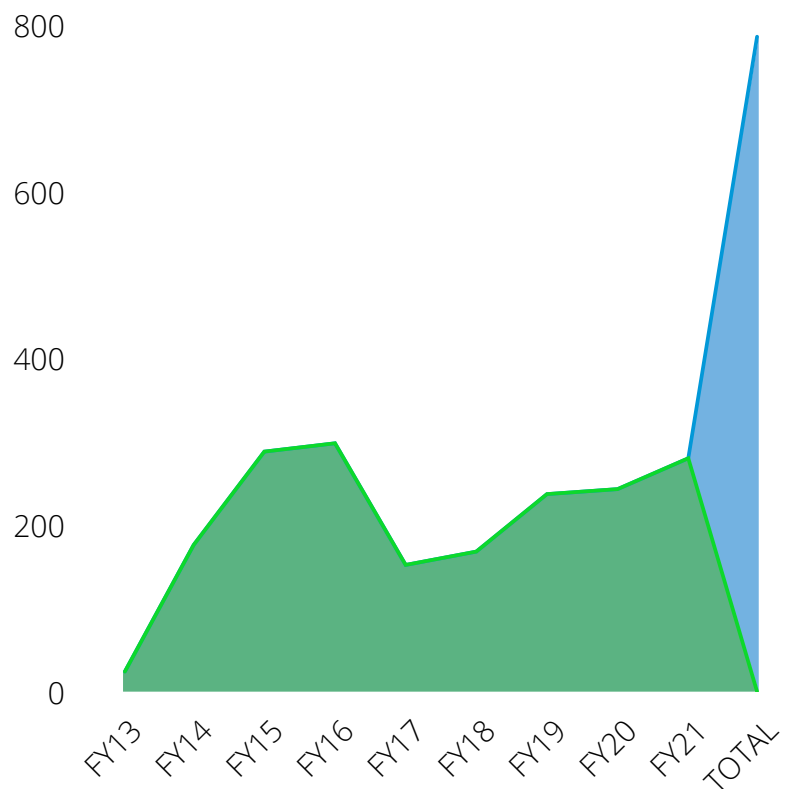
COLLABORATION SPARKS CONNECTION



Through **Play.Learn.Connect.** we have hosted or participated in 470 community events. Providing the community with hundreds of free **developmental screenings, weekly playgroups, parent café and family workshops.** These events focused on early literacy, math and social emotional development. Meeting families where they are to **help children thrive.**

Partners

It takes a village to raise a child and working collectively to ensure they succeed in school and life. SPARK works with other committed agencies and partners to change the landscape of early childhood in our community. Over the past ten years we have had the pleasure and honor to work with **786 champions for early childhood from our partner agencies.**



What Our Partners Say About



We help immigrants and refugees by connecting them to services in the area. We are tremendously grateful for this partnership because as we help families, SPARK helps mothers and fathers and their kids, they help us with free assessments and get them registered for childcare services and preschool. We are able to reach out to SPARK and they are able to connect the families to schools and community resources.

- World Relief, Shannon Wentz



We love partnering with SPARK because their philosophy goes right along with ours. We want to give children the strongest foundation they can possibly have.

- Fox Valley Park District, DeeDee Buscher



OUR WORK IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF OUR GENEROUS FUNDERS

Aurora Rotary Club Foundation

City of Aurora

Dunham Foundation

East Aurora School District 131

Ecolab

Grand Victoria Foundation

Gustafson Family Foundation – DuPage Foundation

IL Action For Children

Indian Prairie School District 204

Kiwanis Club of Aurora

McCormick Foundation

Nuestro Futuro – Chicago Community Trust

PATCH Foundation – Painters District Council #30

West Aurora School District 129



Fox Valley United Way

Fox Valley United Way Campaign Supporters



OUR WORK IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF OUR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

Aunt Martha's Community Health Center
 Aurora Housing Authority
 Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry
 Aurora Public Library
 Aurora University
 Birth to Five Illinois
 City of Aurora
 COFI- Community Organizing and Family Issues
 Community 4:12
 DayOne Pact
 Department of Children and Family Services
 DuPage Children's Museum
 East Aurora School District 131
 Easter Seals
 Family Focus
 Fox Valley Montessori
 Fox Valley Park District
 Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois
 Hesed House
 Hometown Childcare
 Illinois Action for Children
 Indian Prairie School District 204
 Kane County All Our Kids Network
 Kane County Health Department

Kane ROE McKinney Vento Program
 Marie Wilkinson Child Development Center
 Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry
 Metropolitan Family Services
 Mutual Ground
 National Alliance on Mental Illness
 Neighbor Project/Financial Empowerment Center
 One Hope United – Aurora Early Learning Center
 PNC Grow Up Great
 Pregnancy Information Center
 Raising Illinois - Start Early
 Rush Copley Medical Center
 SciTech Museum
 Snap-Ed Illinois Extension
 Start Early
 The Aurora Actionaires Foundation
 Two Rivers Head Start
 VNA Health Care
 Waubensee Community College
 Wesley Preschool
 West Aurora School District 129
 World Relief
 Your Children's Bookshelf
 YWCA Child Care Resource & Referral



Our Parent Advisory Council (past and present)

Amy Bollengier
Blanca Santiago
Carla Torres
Chuck Tuura
Courtney Halverson
Desiree Guzman
Diana Soerens
Gaby Zurita
Ilda Valdez
KaDedria Campbell
Latricia Stone
Lety Figueroa
Liliana Olayo
Maria Gonzalez
Monica Ruiz
Nelly Paredes
Noemi Perez
Patricia Pastor
Samantha Olivas
Shunelle Hollis
Vanessa Aguirre
Yusdivia Gonzalez

Our Parent Volunteers

Adelfa Ebel
Aleyda Santillan
Grace Bales
Hannah Vargo
Jackie Martinez
Kathy Omsberg
Marco Rodriguez
Maria Elena Villagomez
Maria Martinez
Samantha Cadena
Viviana Vargas

More Information

Who We Are & What We Do

[What SPARK Does](#)

[Why Early Learning Matters](#)

[Gateway to Early Childhood Programs](#)

[Who We Are](#)

[Week of the Young Child](#)

[SPARK 10 Years and Counting Video](#)

[Family Resource Guide](#)

Testimonials

[Shannon, World Relief](#)

[DeeDee, Fox Valley Park District](#)

[Samantha, Parent Ambassador](#)

[Chuck & His daughter Tess, Parent](#)





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Fox Valley United Way

Early Childhood Collaboration



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