

2021 IMPACT REPORT



Spark in the Dark

People helping people.

WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER

CONTENTS

3. LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

4. OUR STORY

5. OUR COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

6. OUR NEW COMMUNITIES

7. SPARK BY THE NUMBERS

8. MOMENTS WORTH SHARING

9. GIVING, RECIEVING, AND A PIG NAMED
SPARKLE

10. MEMBER THANK YOU'S

11. OUR SUPPORTERS

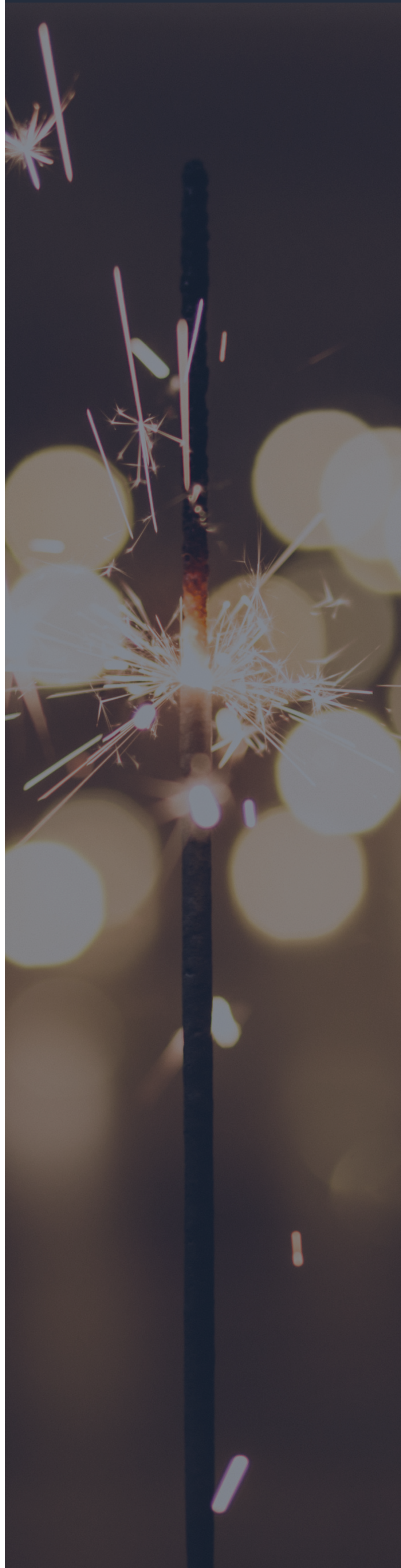
12. DO-GOODERS SPOTTED

13. 2022 GOALS

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we rise by lifting others"

- Robert Ingersoll



LETTER FROM ABAGAIL

This year, instead of using this letter to discuss how the year went - I would like to tell a personal story, a vulnerable moment that led me to leaning on the Spark community myself in a time of need.

You will often find me on stages, radio stations, and any soapbox I can find talking about how none of us are impervious to struggle, that everybody needs help sometimes, and that it happens when we least expect it; this year, that was the case for me. From a miscarriage to a divorce to a broken foot to an unexpected medical diagnosis that left me reeling, 2021 tested me in every way it could – right down to my foundation. Literally.

A crack in my basement foundation that is. One of very few issues that home insurance doesn't cover and comes with a price tag of around \$8,000 to fix – even more problematic than the crack was the fact that I didn't even have \$80 to my name, making this an insurmountable and overwhelming moment to say the least.

Desperate for help, I had no choice but to do what I encourage Spark members to do every day – be vulnerable, be honest, and ask for the help you need; a humbling experience when you are in the leader seat, but as a single mom and a hard worker with no other option – I took my own advice.

I admit I was shy and afraid to ask, so I started by requesting only half of what I needed - somebody to come and tell me what was wrong and what it would cost to fix. To my good fortune, someone I was blessed to help in 2020 with food and clothing reached out offering to come and look for free.

After confirming it was a foundation leak, he did something I wasn't expecting... He offered to come out and repair the problem over the weekend on his own time and as a one man show. Frantic and thankful, I said yes to the offer.

After 7 hours of watching him, I quickly understood why the cost of repair was so high, there was no shortage of labor to be done! When the time came for me to pay him, I asked what I would owe him for all his hard work. In true Spark fashion, he shocked me with his kindness by refusing any money beyond the \$50 he had needed to purchase supplies.

Beside myself and unable to easily accept such a generous gift of time and energy from somebody I barely knew – all I could do was to burst into tears, and ask “but why?”

His response shook me to the core and reminded me of exactly why I began this organization in 2015.

He said – “last year, when my family needed help – you, and the Spark community, were there to catch us. It meant everything for us to know that we were taken care of in our hard times.

You have given me a gift so much greater than any dollar amount; you were there for us when we needed it most. I am happy to help you just because I can, the same way you did for us.”

The last year, the last six years, has only furthered my deep and unwavering belief that everybody should have somebody to help them when they don't know where to turn.

As always, it is my greatest honor to serve these 5 incredible communities as the Executive Director of Spark in the Dark.

Thank you today and every day for your love, support, and beautiful hearts.



Abigail K. McKiernan

PRESIDENT/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

OUR STORY

Using the popular social media platform Facebook, Spark helps connect community members with urgent needs with neighbors who can help them. This includes everything from baby food and clothes, to vehicle repairs, to employment opportunities.

Members across Northern Michigan post a need on the group's page, and watch others in the community comment back, eager to help. The rules: be civil, offer only free items or resources, take only what you need, and if you can, pay it forward.

The model quickly gained traction. Since launching in 2015, we've grown to nearly 23,000 members across multiple groups. We've seen our communities work together to help one another with physical and emotional needs, and advice.

Spark in the Dark is redefining what it means to be a successful nonprofit by connecting people in need directly with neighbors who are able to help.

As the first of our kind, we are changing the nonprofit sector by using technology and social media to turn online conversations into offline communities.

We do not turn people away who have unusual or difficult cases, who are feeling hopeless and forgotten; we walk alongside them and connect them into a community of tens of thousands of locals who have the resources to help get them thrive.

We hope you'll join us!

2015

Spark is created as a simple Facebook group with the goal of helping connect those in need with those who can help.

Spark continues to grow its online presence, helping hundreds of members and learning important lessons along the way.

2016

2017

Spark becomes a 501c3 and grows to approximately 1600 total members.

As Spark continues to grow more and more members of the business community step up to support our online community.

2018

2019

Spark started 2019 with 7,800 members and now has over 11,000.

Spark joined the Facebook Community Accelerator, started two new Northern Michigan Spark groups, and launched the Auto repair fund with Bill Marsh!

2020

2021

Spark launches two new groups in Wexford County and Lansing Area and continues to grow!

OUR VOLUNTEERS

we are proud to say that all of our groups continued to grow through 2021 at incredible rates and be huge blessings to their communities and it would be impossible to do without our incredible team of volunteers!



ROSE FOSDICK - MANISTEE

I got involved with Spark in the Dark because it has a positive impact in the lives of both those that receive help and those that give help. Building a better world for all through kindness



DANYAL BLAKESLEE - MANISTEE

Joining the Spark team has been such a privilege! I've come to realize that those who give most are often the ones that have the least. That selfless love deeply inspires and motivates me to help more!



BETH TAYLOR-URBAN - MANISTEE

Spark helps to keep me informed of the larger overall picture of needs going unsupported in my community; I love being involved in something that makes someone's day go just a bit easier.



TIFFANIE MALEE - MT. PLEASANT

I love the vision of Spark, and what it does for the community. I am so inspired by this group, and I am happy to serve as an Administrator with this amazing group.



SELINDA MANDARANO - TRAVERSE CITY

As a volunteer in the Spark community, it is a gift to witness the good in people every single day. To me, Spark stands for - Spirit, Purpose, Affinity, Respect, Kindness



SHANNON PECK - TRAVERSE CITY

I volunteer because after my dad died, I found healing and support in the Spark group. This is my way of giving back to the community that helped me so much.



SAMANTHA MILLS - TRAVERSE CITY

I felt led to become a Spark admin because from the day Spark began I got to watch thousands of needs being met, oftentimes, by perfect strangers. Being able to help our community with the things they needs is a huge blessing.



JENNIFER MORNEAU - NATIONAL

I chose to get involved with Spark to positively impact those in need. I believe in the strength of community and wanted to be a part of an organization that empowers others through its culture of kindness and giving.



ABAGAIL MCKIERNAN - NATIONAL

I began Spark in 2015 with the goal of re-creating the most impactful moment I had ever seen - a stranger helping someone just because they could. I believe that everybody should have somebody to call on in their time of need.

OUR NEW COMMUNITIES

Wexford County, Michigan

This group covers a 40 mile radius of Wexford/Missaukee County Michigan and was brought to the area through a collaboration by United Way, Cadillac Area Community Foundation, Human Services Leadership Team, donor Wendy Musselman, donor Joseph Tenbusch Sr. in honor of his mother Evelyn Jean Tenbusch may she rest in peace, and a matching grant from Facebook inc.



NIKI SHULTZ

I chose to be a Spark in the Dark admin because I have a strong desire to walk alongside members in my community. I believe that all people have the power to make a difference and the Spark in the Dark groups give members an opportunity to do just that in both small and large ways.



NICOLE BOSSCHER

I love seeing how generous people are when they read a post from someone going through a rough time. It's also been great for our area agencies that help those in need to find and connect people to what items they aren't able to give. I'm so glad I get to be a part of this amazing group of people helping people!



DOREEN LANC

Spark has given many members of our community the opportunity to help others in need quickly. Many individuals that have the heart to help but don't always know how feel honored to pay for a gas card so someone can get to work, provide bedding for a family, or help with baby supplies for a new mom.. It is a blessing to our area.

Lansing Area, Michigan

This group covers a 45 mile radius of Lansing Michigan and was brought to the area by Williamston Sunrise Rotary and matching grant from Facebook inc.



DEBORAH WOLF

After hearing Abby speak at the local Rotary club, I knew that I wanted to be involved with Spark! I love watching the interplay between people with needs and those who generously give. I tell everyone how heartwarming it is to see kindness in action!



CHRIS LEWIS

Spark in the Dark allows me to give back to the local community and provides me with the ability to help people get the things that they need most, supporting them throughout their life journey. Thank you to Williamston Sunrise Rotary for bringing Spark in the Dark to our area.



KAY GOLUSKA

I believe in volunteering because it is a way that I can give back to the world, even if it is only my little area of the world, all the goodness and blessings I have been granted in life. I feel strongly that Spark is doing great things and by being an admin I have the opportunity to help others.



KAREN WILDROM

I love the idea of people helping people with no expectation of reward. Being able to help the Lansing Spark become a reality is an honor and I'm so grateful for the chance to do something that can make a difference for others in my community!

SPARK BY THE NUMBERS

IN 2021

OUR TOTAL ONLINE ACTIVITY

20,751

NEW
POSTS

142,722

NEW
COMENTS

88%

ACTIVITY
RATE



2021 was Spark's biggest growth year to date, Adding two more groups and seeing the highest activity rate we have ever had month over month since beginning in 2017.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

6,041

NEW
MEMBERS

22,740

TOTAL
MEMBERS

36%

GROWTH
RATE



Spark continues to grow, attracting new members in the communities we serve, nearly 9 out of 10 of whom remain active.

OUR PERFORMANCE

16,278

APPROX
NEEDS MET

9

NEW ADMINS
TRAINED

1 | 2

STAFF AND
CONTRACTORS

71,278

APPROX
NEEDS MET
SINCE 2017

16

TOTAL
ADMINS FOR
ALL GROUPS

2 | 5

NEW AND
TOTAL
GROUPS



Four-fifths of all needs expressed on Spark's Facebook group are addressed, most within the first 24 hours. All while utilizing one paid staff member and a team of volunteer admins.

IT'S ABOUT THE MOMENTS...

COMMUNITY FOUND FOR A 7 YEAR OLD

My 7 year old grand daughter lost her daddy in November of this year and didn't know what to do with herself. She wasn't interested in much, even Christmas so I thought to reach out to Spark members and see if they could send her a Christmas card in the mail... Boy did they! 44 cards, 3 gift cards, and gifts kept coming to our surprise! It gave her something to look forward to every day, for days! Even the Ghost Busters of TC surprised her with a visit! We are forever grateful...

- KELLY



HOLIDAY BLESSING

Spark in the Dark recently provided me with one of the most interesting holiday experiences I've ever had. I was looking for a new home for two couches I no longer had a use for. After a short period of time, I found an individual who could use them. She came to pick them up with her three year old son. We shared a cup of coffee and talked about the holidays and her family. We began speaking of her other children with one being a son with autism. We talked about how she had spent all her excess money on gifts for her kids and that the couches were her Christmas gift. It made me feel like a stronger part of my community, knowing this was truly and tangibly making a difference for someone. - JOE B.

WINTER WARMTH

I was blessed with not only brand new snow pants, which is what I had asked for help with, but this member also gifted me some incredibly nice gloves and insulated pants and shirts. I suffer from Raynaud syndrome. So it's important for me to stay very warm. I also wanted to be able to play with my son outside. I was struggling from having my hours cut, brake issues, engine work on my car, moving, and of course just being a single mom. I feel so blessed to have had the help. -ATARAH



AUTO REPAIR FOR MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

I needed a muffler and other work done on my car this year, I reached out and found the help I needed from Spark in the Dark and Bill Marsh Auto. I could not have afforded to get everything fixed and would have been forced to damage my car further by driving and not repairing it had they not helped me; it ended up being over \$2,000 to repair everything, we were able to split the cost! My vehicle is vital to my wellbeing as it gets me to my doctor's appointments, physical therapy, massage therapist to treat the after effects of breast cancer, chemotherapy, and my double mastectomy. What everyone did to get my car fixed, meant the world to me and I cannot possibly say thank you enough for the kindness and help! - KENDRA





GIVING, RECIEVING, AND A PIG NAMED SPARKLE

Meet Sparkle!

Sparkle the pig was named by the Traverse City Spark in the Dark members earlier this summer through comments and votes as a way for the Wescott family to show their thanks and appreciation to the many Spark members who have helped them through a difficult 2021, a hard year for many.

While the year brought many hardships to the family, in true Spark in the Dark fashion, the Wescott family still found ways to help as they were able by delivering over 40 mattresses to members in need from a friend who often has surplus mattresses from his company; helping members move; and gifting food from their small farm that they could afford to spare throughout the year.

Right as things were beginning to look up for the family, an unexpected twist left them in a potentially life-threatening situation without the resources they needed.

The family, temporarily living in their camper, had just refilled their propane tanks, used to heat the space, and hooked one up only to be greeted by a high-pitched squealing noise accompanied by the smell of burning just before the camper filled with smoke moments after turning on the furnace. "I have a disorder that I will freeze to death in a third of the time it would take a normal person. My husband suffers from severe anxiety and the thought of me being in this weather literally terrified him." said Dee Wescott, "I didn't know what to do, all I could think of was Spark and to pray that someone could help somehow, even if it was suggestion/recommendations."

The recommendations came pouring in as the family began to slowly feel the spark community affect, but that spark ignited into a flame as the desk clerk from the hotel they checked into informed them that "a friend paid for you through Sunday," a suspected Spark member who preferred to stay anonymous. Through further recommendations from Spark members, the family was able to find a retired gentleman who offered to fix the issue.

The Wescott family updated their post sharing about the hotel and generous offer from the man to fix the problem for a very reasonable amount, only to receive a message shortly after from a member named Amy saying she'd like to donate to help with the cost of the repair needed.

"She sent the full \$450 we needed! I am still in shock," said Dee.

"Thank you so much to everyone who helped us in our hardest times, and thank you Spark in the Dark for being there when we needed help the most."

- The Wescott's



MEMBER THANKS & TESTIMONIALS

I would like to thank you all again for so much generosity in helping me with my car repairs and then all your prayers after my car accident

-PHOEBE

I would just like to say thanks to the ones who have donated to myself and the others of the group.
I smile every time I see people donating needs such as formula and food. Such great an generous people on this site. Along with a huge Thanks to the admins who I'm sure work endless hours for this page.

-KRIS

I am very thankful for this group!! People show every day, how caring and generous they can be!! I'm grateful for the help that I have received....I hope I can help others as well!

- LYNETTE

I want to thank Jeff F. for all of his help. He has helped me out a few times and I'm truly grateful for his kindness.

- LINDA

I am very thankful for this group!
Almost 2 years ago I moved into my own place. Folks on here helped me to furnish it for me and my kids. This group means a lot to me. I moved to Traverse City almost 4 years ago after my divorce. Starting over was not easy without the help of this amazing community of folks This group now gives me a platform to give back to my community. Thank you everyone

-MELISSA

Thank you all for coming together for my family! We deeply appreciated all the help. God bless! A big shout out to Dena S. thank you!

- KIMBERLEE

To Bill Marsh, Spark in the Dark, and TC brakes team - you are all my angels thank you so very much for everything!
A fixed vehicle now means I can make it to my doctor appointment - I have 6 doctors to see plus with my husband being out of work life has not been easy - you have turned my darkness into light, thank you!

May you always be blessed we will never ever forget how you have helped us. I can not thank you enough, sending love and big virtual hugs!

-Lisa

I would like to personally thank all of the Sparks that I see out in our community helping others ALL THE TIME, even when they may be struggling themselves. When you go out of your way to help someone while needing help yourself, you are showing LOVE to your community; and that is what we are all about! Giving with no thought of getting anything in return, and forever caring for your neighbors... With that being said, thank you all for being such amazing Sparks; you inspire me every single day

-DANYAL

This group is just a blessing in disguise. The amount of people who are more than willing to help is just so admirable. I'm originally from Central Pennsylvania and you would NEVER see people help like this. It warms my heart that this group exists. I don't have names of everyone who has helped our family in time of need, but we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for everything.

-KERRY

Aleatha A. , Elizabeth B. , and Wanda C. have been my saving graces with rides! Due to an ACL injury I have been left without transportation. These sparks are amazing!

-LIBBY

OUR SUPPORTERS

Our donors are a collection of wonderful businesses and individuals that help in their own unique way but all share the same desire to build community. If you're interested in joining our cause or our community we would love to share a cup of coffee and talk about what makes the most sense for everyone.



BILL MARSH AUTO GROUP
Auto repair fund/ recurring donor



MY SECRET STASH
Spark apparel line carried here



RESTORATION CHURCH
Serve Sundays - get involved!



TRAVERSE CITY WHISKEY CO
Featured Spark in the Dark drink



FACEBOOK, INC.
Community Partnership Accelerator



THANK YOU!

Running an organization of this size is no small feat, and doing it without the generosity of our recurring and regular givers would make it near impossible! It is with our deepest gratitude that we thank the following Spark supporters:

- BRIAN WILLIAMS
- EDDY LOESCH
- JEN O'BRIEN
- DONNA DEBOER
- KATE REDMAN
- VICTORIA HUGHES
- SELINDA MANDARANO
- JAN NICKERSON
- RHONDA WASSOM
- ANNE BONNEY
- CORISSA GEER

- EDWARD BURLEY
- GLORIA RANSOM
- SHARON VREELAND
- KATHRYN KING
- NATALYA TERZEMAN
- JULIE MILLEN
- COLLEEN CURTIS
- JILLIAN ROACH
- DALE DEVRIES
- RICK TAYLOR
- MARTY BAXTER

- TINA POINDEXTER
- GENEVIEVE ROMEOS
- JOSEPH TENBUSCH SR.
- ANNE SOLEM
- JENNIFER HAYDOCK
- CASEY KILEY
- JACKIE RAU
- ARIKA WILHELM
- VICTORIA SLAWNIK
- LINDA KELLEY
- JENNIFER TAYLOR

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS AND RECURRING DONORS ARE THE BIGGEST CONTRIBUTOR OF KEEPING OUR ORGANIZATION FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE - BECOME A DONOR TODAY AT:

www.sparkinthedark.org/donate

SPARK APPAREL SPOTTED!



COUNTRY STAR- DREW HALE



LOCAL STAR - GRANT FORRESTER



PASTOR - BRIAN WILLIAMS

Whether it is Country star Drew Hale, Public speaker Anne Bonney, Restoration Church Pastor Brian Williams, or community advocate and local comedian Matthew Zerrili - Spark apparel has made a splash in Traverse City and continues to spread in popularity across the state!

We've proudly partnered with Tee See Tee and T-shirt Robot to produce a line of do-gooder apparel! All proceeds go to Spark to help us keep connecting thousands of needs each year and launching new Spark communities.

Get yours at:
sparkinthedark.org/merchandise



COMEDIAN - MATTHEW ZERRILI



SPARK FOUNDER & MOTHER DIANE



RADIO HOST - NICOLE PENCE



PUBLIC SPEAKER - ANNE BONNEY



PHOTOGRAPHER - KACI BEE

A close-up, black and white photograph of a lit sparkler, with bright sparks radiating outwards, creating a starburst effect. The background is dark and out of focus.

2022 GOALS

Seeing the impact Spark in the Dark had in 2021 for our 5 communities has inspired us to push even harder in 2022 to create strong and resilient communities to ensure that everybody has somebody in their time of need.

Our expansion goals:

4 new communities

Our program goals;

1. Expand and grow the Bill Marsh auto repair fund
2. Launch a 2nd auto repair fund in a new community
3. Launch our mental wellness fund that will help those in need to find and pay for the mental health services that they need regardless of their income or insurance.

Our financial goals:

100 monthly recurring donors @ \$100/each that will allow us to continue our good works through building new communities and creating programs that seek to fill gaps in service for our members in need.

5 new business community partners to come alongside us for yearly fundraising campaigns and new program partnerships.

Become a recurring donor here:

sparkinthedark.org/donate

See our communities and programs here:

sparkinthedark.org



Spark in the Dark

People helping people.

231-360-8919 | www.sparkinthedark.org | info@sparkinthedark.org

You can find us online at www.facebook.com/sparkinthedarkpage

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