

# Building Synergy Through Foundation-Led Initiatives

With our Foundation-led initiatives, we focus on systemic change in order to make a lasting difference within complex community concerns: early childhood education, homelessness, and behavioral health. Using multifaceted strategies helps us to build community over the long term.

## What if Domestic Violence Project, Inc. didn't exist?

Jane\* is 34 years old. She has a college degree and a full-time job in accounting. She and her husband have three children under the age of five. She grew up in Arizona and has no family here. Jane's been repeatedly late for work. Her coworkers notice bruises and ask questions; she makes excuse after excuse. The child care center has noticed too. Children's Services is now involved.

Jane's walking on eggshells to keep the peace at home. She's experiencing trauma and depression, with no idea of what to do. Without Domestic Violence Project, Inc., there's a very good chance she could end up losing her job, her children, and her home. Thank goodness Domestic Violence Project, Inc. is here for vulnerable neighbors like Jane. Domestic Violence Project, Inc. can shelter her and her children, provide peer support so she understands she's not alone, and stay right by her side through the legal process so she and her children can begin to heal and thrive.

*\*Jane is not a real person. She's a composite persona based on facts from real-life cases.*

## Domestic Violence Project, Inc.

Domestic Violence Project, Inc. (DVPI) helps victims of domestic violence become survivors of domestic violence. The emergency and supportive services DVPI provides are essential. They help our neighbors meet the most basic need there is: the need for safety and security.

The Sisters of Charity Foundation has been a longtime supporter. Sustaining DVPI's work speaks to the heart of our mission.

Alarming, federal funding for victim services has been decreasing. DVPI continues to provide emergency shelter, transitional housing, legal advocacy services, and outreach services amid dwindling funding levels and a perpetually uncertain fiscal future.

A community without resources for victims of domestic violence is unimaginable. As federal funding has waned, we've stepped in to help strengthen infrastructure. In 2023, we partnered with DVPI to support shelter operations, ensuring services could continue to be provided throughout Stark County.

We also committed to partnering with DVPI leadership to help them innovate to secure additional funding or develop new resources, because DVPI is a fundamental element of the safe community our neighbors need.

“Synergy is what happens when one plus one equals ten or a hundred or even a thousand! It's the profound result when two or more respectful human beings determine to go beyond their preconceived ideas to meet a great challenge.”

- STEPHEN COVEY

## Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK)

Our focus on early childhood has been a cornerstone of our work since our inception. The Sisters of Charity Foundation created the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program, a program that provides a kindergarten readiness advantage for families with preschool-age children, nurturing it as it grew from an idea to a plan to a sheer force for school readiness success. We cheered as the program went on to reach thousands of families throughout Ohio.

SPARK has transformed in surprising ways, achieving beyond anything we had envisioned. The program has flourished in the capable hands of the Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC). The ECRC also emerged from a Foundation initiative; as with SPARK, it has achieved well beyond what was imagined.

SPARK operations are the responsibility of the ECRC, and SPARK replication sites are operated by organizations throughout the state. In 2023, the Sisters of Charity Foundation supported the expansion of programming for two replicating organizations here in Stark County: the Early Childhood Education Alliance serves Alliance SPARK families and AHEAD, Inc. serves Massillon SPARK families.

Program sustainability and expansion at these SPARK sites will give even more children a better start. SPARK participants significantly outscore non-participating peers on Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, indicating that they enter kindergarten more ready to succeed. The scores are also a strong predictor of school success. In 2022, nearly half of Stark County SPARK kids scored high enough to predict that they will read on grade level in third grade, compared to 30 percent of their non-SPARK peers.



Alainna works with her SPARK parent partner, Kim.



**Alainna:  
Making Great Progress**

Sisters of Charity Foundation funding ensures that even more children in Alliance will benefit from the Early Childhood Education Alliance’s SPARK program. The program serves children like Alainna, who might not have had such a strong start without the support of her SPARK parent partner, Kim.

Alainna is such a high-energy girl that her mom, Ashley, was initially reluctant to enroll in SPARK; she wasn’t sure Alainna would be able to benefit. It was extremely hard for Alainna to focus and frustrating for her to transition to new tasks. Kim suspected vision issues; her suspicion turned out to be correct.

With proper vision correction, Alainna became a completely different child. She eagerly engaged in lessons. Because she still had lots of energy, Kim shortened activity times, added music and movement to harness wiggles into learning, and integrated challenging tasks that intrinsically motivated her, like finding a story with pictures of a little girl who looked just like Alainna. She began to recognize sight words and blend sounds and started asking how to spell words.

Ashley has been impressed with Kim, who “helped me as a parent understand that I am my daughter’s first teacher and gave me tips to help boost my confidence when it comes to teaching Alainna.” Ashley also raves about the astonishing difference in her daughter, saying, “It was shortly after she got glasses that she started reading to us. Now, Alainna is an excellent reader, and it all began with SPARK. I cannot say enough good things about the program, and I am so thankful that Alainna was able to be a part of it!”



SPARK