



Supporting Partnerships
to Assure Ready Kids

SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION of Canton

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine

PARENT NEWSLETTER
FALL 2009

The Director's Corner

Dear Parents,

SPARK Ohio is committed to helping families get their children ready for kindergarten, and to do this, we have extended our reach in the community. Through the generous support of Canton City Schools, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, and an anonymous donor, we are now able to serve five neighborhoods in the Canton City School District: Belden, Belle Stone, Gibbs, McGregor, and Youtz as well as school districts in Alliance and Minerva!!

As you will see throughout this newsletter, the SPARK team and our community partners provide a variety of services and supports for children and families, including oral health services through the Bethlehem Project and social and emotional support through our responsive services team.

Additionally, we have dedicated parent partners in Alliance, Canton, and Minerva ready and willing to assist you as your child's first and most important teacher. Our parent partners have developed trusting, meaningful relationships with SPARK children and families and have provided them with helpful resources, educational activities, and support services.

We appreciate each of our community partners, but more importantly, we appreciate all the families that have welcomed us into their homes and shared our goal of kindergarten readiness!

Sincerely,

Shana Rozier
SPARK Program Coordinator

SPARK Family Spotlight



Geavonna Cricks with her SPARK parent partner Tinia Gillems

Marcia spoke with her about going to school one day.

Marcia says, "Geavonna was so turned off to school. She was really shy and not receptive when we talked to her about school. Once Miss Tinia (Geavonna's parent partner) came, everything turned around. It's very important – it has made all the difference in the world. Before she just did not want to go to school, and it changed so quickly."

According to Marcia, the thing that made the biggest difference is that

We love to hear stories about SPARK families who are pleased with the program. We sat down with one family who feels that SPARK not only helped them prepare their child for school, but also helped her develop a love of reading and learning.

Geavonna Cricks is four years old, and has been enrolled in SPARK for

the past year. Marcia Turner, Geavonna's grandmother, is simply thrilled with the difference that SPARK has made for Geavonna. At first, because of her shyness, Geavonna was upset when

Geavonna immediately started to trust her parent partner, who visits her monthly and provides books and learning materials. Now she actually looks forward to preschool, and even looks forward to getting on her school bus every day. Geavonna's favorite part of Miss Tinia's visits are the activities they do together.

Geavonna is now excited about reading in a way she just wasn't before she joined SPARK. Marcia often reads *The Runaway Bunny* with Geavonna—it's her favorite book—and asks questions about the bunny and about what happens in the book. Marcia

Marcia tells us that through SPARK, Geavonna has learned to:

- Share
- Pick up her things
- Identify shapes, colors, and letters, especially the letters in her name
- Lessen her shyness through attending SPARK groups



Dear Dr. Cece,

I am worried about the way my son talks. It is so hard to understand what he is trying to say. Then he gets very frustrated and acts mean. I am not sure how to help him.

**Signed,
Puzzled Parent**

Dear Puzzled Parent,

SPARK has the answer for your puzzling worry. Share your concerns with your SPARK parent partner. She will share them with the responsive services team. The responsive services team responds to the needs of SPARK children and parents who are experiencing challenges like the ones you are worried about. The responsive services team includes a child psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an early childhood specialist, and a mental health specialist. This team meets with the parent partners every month to consider ways to help children when parents have concerns. They make plans to set up the services and supports that a child needs to get ready for kindergarten.

So solve your puzzle and ease your worries. Talk with your parent partner and get connected to the responsive services team.

**Signed,
Dr. Cece**

*If you would like to submit your questions to Dr. Cece, please contact your parent partner or mail to:
SPARK Ohio/Dr. Cece Column,
400 Market Avenue North, Suite 300, Canton, OH 44702*

The Bethlehem Project

LIGHTING THE WAY TO LASTING SMILES.

FOR ORAL HEALTH

SPARK Welcomes the Bethlehem Project for Oral Health

SPARK is pleased to announce that Stark County SPARK families will now be able to receive services from the Bethlehem Project for Oral Health. The Bethlehem Project will provide dental education and care services for eligible families in Alliance, Canton, and Minerva.



Bethlehem Project services will be provided during the regularly scheduled SPARK home visits. Parent partners will help address issues that might be preventing families from seeing the dentist, such as transportation and child care issues. Participating families will learn about fluoride, brushing and flossing, tooth decay, nutritious snacking, and other oral health topics. Parent partners will still provide the typical lessons aligned with Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards.

Bethlehem Project services are scheduled to begin in January, 2010, and will be available to the entire family. Your parent partner will soon be sharing information with you about signing up to receive Bethlehem Project services.

"I was really afraid of going to the dentist after a bad experience when I was younger, but my home visitor helped me get over my fear and even went with me the first time I went to the dentist in many years."

Along with teaching good habits like brushing and flossing, SPARK parent partners will teach participating Bethlehem Project families how to prepare tasty snacks that are healthy and good for their teeth, like the muffins below:

Healthy Recipe, Courtesy of the Bethlehem Project

Australian Sugar-Free, Non-Fat Muffins

Ingredients

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 large bananas | 1 tsp baking powder |
| ½ cup non-fat fruit yogurt | 2 eggs |
| 1 tsp cinnamon | 2 cups flour |
| 1/3-1/2 cup skim milk | |

Directions

- Mash bananas. Mix in eggs and yogurt.
- Place flour, cinnamon, and baking powder together in a large bowl and mix well.
- Add milk until you can mix all ingredients together. Add just enough to coat the dry ingredients.
- Spoon into non-stick muffin pan.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, or until golden brown.



Day in the Life of a SPARK Parent Partner



SPARK sat down with Linda Lairson, to learn about her role as a SPARK parent partner.

SPARK: *Can you describe a typical day?*

Linda: Sometimes I have a first visit scheduled with a new family, which means it's the introduction to the child and the family.

Sometimes during a home visit, a parent might come to me with a problem, like the child is misbehaving, and ask for some guidance. If there's a question about a frustrating behavior, I can speak to our responsive services team, which includes experts on child behavior, to get ideas on how to handle the situation. Children with special challenges might need to be

connected to a community agency for assistance.

There may be a recruiting event that day. As a recruiter, I like to highlight the fact that SPARK children consistently – for the past four years – scored higher than non-SPARK children on the standardized kindergarten test (the KRA-L)! Those statistics catch the families' attention – families want to be a part of a program that will measurably improve standardized test scores.

SPARK: *What's your favorite part of your job?*

Linda: What is really neat is to come back to the home and, often, the parent has built on the previous lesson and expanded on what we've already done, like maybe now the child is able to sing their ABCs when they weren't before.

The best thing is how people let me into their lives and share their joys and sorrows. It's an honor to be involved and to be able to help. I recently had a mom who was going through a really difficult time in her life. **At the end of the visit, she said "I feel like this visit was more for me than my daughter."**

SPARK: *What would you say to parents who might be considering enrolling their children in SPARK, but are hesitating for some reason?*

Linda: I'd tell them that we have wonderful parent partners who really love kids, have a lot of knowledge on every aspect of the program, and are genuinely interested in helping the children and families. The program is free, and offers so many benefits!

The benefits of SPARK include:

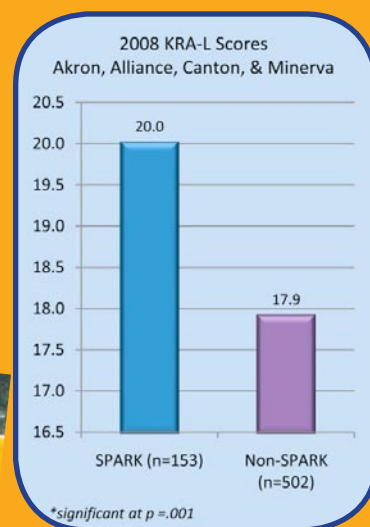
- monthly home visits from a caring parent partner who listens and guides families
- free books and activity kits
- help for parents on how to be effective as their children's first teacher
- screenings of children, to make sure that children are on track
- special support, if needed



SPARK parent partners work with SPARK families to help their children get ready for kindergarten. They make monthly home visits, give families free books and activity kits, and empower parents to be effective as their children's first teacher.

Parent partners also assist parents with administering developmental screenings, to make sure that children are on track, and address issues preventing school readiness. The information from the screenings is also used to develop a learning plan for each child that lists the steps to kindergarten readiness.

Parent partners listen to parents and help them with their concerns. If a child needs special support to allow for healthy development, parent partners can assist families in connecting to community resources that offer speech or language assistance and social or emotional support.



SPARK children score higher than non-SPARK children on the KRA-L test that measures kindergarten readiness.

Belden Elementary Joins SPARK Ohio



SPARK Ohio is pleased to announce the addition of Belden Elementary School in the Canton City school district! This means that families who live in the neighborhood of Belden Elementary School are now eligible to join SPARK.

Canton City SPARK schools are:

- Belden Elementary
- Belle Stone Elementary
- Gibbs Elementary
- McGregor Elementary
- Youtz Elementary

Families in these neighborhoods with children who are three or four years old may join SPARK for free, and receive:

- Up to 16 free monthly books, supplies, and learning activity kits
- Monthly visits from a parent partner to help children and families get ready for kindergarten
- Information about their child's development
- An educational plan for school readiness
- Access to community resources, if needed
- Opportunities to meet other families in their neighborhood

There are seven SPARK schools in Stark County, including Alliance and Minerva. To join SPARK, contact your local recruiter at the number listed on the back of this newsletter, or visit www.sparkohio.org.



SPARK Receives School District Funding



**CANTON CITY
SCHOOLS**

SPARK is excited to announce that the Canton City Schools' Leadership Team and the Canton Board of Education decided to use a portion of their federal stimulus funding to make a two-year, \$200,000 commitment to SPARK in two Canton City elementary schools.

We are proud to have such committed partners at the table, working with us toward a common goal — school readiness. ✨

Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Joins SPARK

We are thrilled to announce that representatives from Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health have joined the Canton and Minerva SPARK responsive services team.

The responsive services team includes a child psychologist, an early childhood educational specialist, a speech and language therapist, and now a representative from Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health. The team meets monthly with parent partners to discuss any child whose parent has a concern. They also meet when parent partners are concerned about a child or a concern is indicated from the many screenings that SPARK children participate in, such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.

Representatives from Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health will be available to visit with children and parents at home or school and consult with parents, parent partners, and teachers when a child is experiencing a social, emotional, or behavioral challenge. They can brainstorm with parents, parent partners, and teachers about ways to help with these challenges.

Referrals have always been made to Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health, but having them participate fully in the discussion and review process will greatly enhance and speed up services to families.

To discuss the responsive services process, speak with your SPARK parent partner. ✨

**Early
Experiences
Last a Lifetime**

Member of the Stark County Early Childhood Communications Collaborative

www.earlyexperiences.org

If you haven't checked out the *Early Experiences* site lately, you'll want to! The site is a great local resource for parents and caregivers. Visitors can learn about developmental milestones, fun activities for them and their children, and how to choose a child care facility.

The Stark County Early Childhood Communications Collaborative, a group of interested community and early childhood leaders, has created this local campaign to make parents aware of the importance of early childhood learning.

Many thanks to the Canton Area Association for the Education of Young Children for distributing the *Early Experiences* campaign banners that now hang in child care centers throughout Stark County.



Children at the J.R. Coleman Child Care Center are excited about the *Early Experiences* campaign!



SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION of Canton

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To enroll, contact:

Alliance Local Schools

Joe French, Director

Early Childhood Education Alliance, Inc.

Phone: (330) 829-1234 ext: 2952

Email: joeray333@sbcglobal.net

Canton City Schools

Linda Lairson, recruiter

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Minerva Local Schools

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Ronele Syme, recruiter

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Parent Partner Questions

Shana Rozier, Program Coordinator

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SPARK Family Spotlight CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

says, “that book we read and read,” and Geavonna will often then say to her grandmother, “I read to you, Mama.”

Marcia says that Geavonna talks constantly about her parent partner, Miss Tinia, the new book Miss Tinia will be bringing on her next visit, and how they’ll be reading it together. Through SPARK, Geavonna has also learned her shapes and colors and even how to put her toys away. Marcia says, “I noticed a BIG difference in her.”

Marcia says SPARK has helped Geavonna focus as well. “And it is helpful for us to get activities to do with her, too. One thing that impresses me is that there can be so much going on in this house – but if Miss Tinia is here, she is focused on THAT.”

Marcia says that “Miss Tinia is the best there is. She just seems to be able to get her right down and focused on testing or whatever the task is at hand.” 

If your family would like to be featured in the SPARK Family Spotlight, contact your parent partner.



Fall Family Fun Time!

- Children will receive a free book and learning materials
- Snacks will be provided
- Group activities
- Open to all SPARK children

See your SPARK parent partner for more details



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