

S.P.A.R.K

Society

Stories of Inspiration
— 2017 —





All it takes is a spark.

Actions and Reactions

Thirty members of The S.P.A.R.K. Society were chosen to receive a \$100 gift card in the hope that with it, they would create a Small Purposeful Act of Random Kindness. The only instructions were to use it as a catalyst to something great, or to give the card to a person or organization that would.

There were no expectations of repayment, no strings attached, no hopes but that the recipient would use the gift in a way to achieve something truly meaningful, and share the results with the giver.

These are their stories.

John and I Volunteer for the Schenk Nutritional Program through our Church, St. Dennis Catholic Church. The group shops for nutritional foods, and bags the bags for the next day and then takes to Schenk Elementary School on Friday to put into kid's backpacks so they have food on the weekend. It has been up to 110 kids that need this food per week. So sad! We see the smile on kids that we meet and the excitement when they ask "What did you bring this week?" It is a sad and a shocking reality that we have children wanting for food and going to bed hungry. We donated this money to this program so it can continue. There are 5 churches on the East side that participate in this program. We are proud to be involved in this project and we know that this \$100 will provide many bags of food for our grateful children.

-John and Jane L.

This is the first year that we were challenged to pass on our gift from Midwest Financial Group to someone else. We hope our friends had as much fun as we have had in passing that blessing on to someone else! This year we ignited some of our own efforts to create change in someone's life. We have long been supporters of Second Harvest Foodbank. One of our friends is also very involved in the organization and challenged many of his friends to donate over the holidays with a matching pledge from himself and his wife. We decided to make that contribution, which was matched, to purchase 750 pounds of food! That is enough to provide 600 meals to families in need here in Southwest Wisconsin. The vast majority of these meals provide food to low income, working families. Many of them have medical issues and the majority have young children. As we sit down to enjoy the many holiday parties and meals with friends and family it's easy to forget about those that will not be able to enjoy the same benefits. A small contribution to a well-run organization can help alleviate that problem. Ninety four cents out of each dollar goes directly into product for distribution. It's hard to imagine that one in eight persons in Southwest Wisconsin has a need for assistance. I feel very good about the impact our involvement has made.

-John and Kris D.

Shanon serves as Agency Coordinator for this new Community Outreach Center serving the Wisconsin Heights and surrounding area. Opening in January 2017 will be a permanent food pantry and clothing closet along with other future services for those needing extra assistance in our area. Currently there is a \$10,000 matching gift so the \$100 turned into \$200!

-Andrew and Shanon B.

In support of our Initiative to offer a gift of meals to over 500 meals in need in our Community, every year. This contribution helped in that cause to Second Harvest Foodbank.

-Bob and Carol R.

Francesca is the daughter of a good friend and kindergarten teacher in Milwaukee. She had one of her kindergarteners killed while crossing the street with her mom. Francesca has been raising money to help the little girl's family during their time of grief. I thought Francesca could use the S.P.A.R.K. gift card to help the family during this difficult time.

-Carol T.

I had an Automatic Deposit from my weekly paycheck go to "The United Way of Dane County." This past October I lost my job and had to stop this auto deposit for personal financial reasons. I am very grateful that S.P.A.R.K. chose to give me the gift to pay forward. I chose the "Students Succeed" Program because it has a proven record and goals to help students succeed and graduate from high school regardless of race. I strongly believe that education is one of the key building blocks to a stable life. It benefits the whole community. Thank you, S.P.A.R.K.!

-Tim and Lorry W.

I stopped at Lynnsey & Ryan's home to give them this gift. They have 3 children of their own but in November they adopted 3 siblings ages 2-5, each with special needs. I believe anyone with 6 children can benefit from \$100, but adding these 3 boys to their own 3 boys makes them extra special. I also chose them because I was adopted and my anniversary date is this time of year. We have many connecting points, but Lynnsey and Ryan's compassion deserved to be highlighted by this S.P.A.R.K.!

-Betsy F.

I met Daniel while volunteering at the local food pantry. He and his wife and five children were having a very difficult time since he lost his job. I shared his story with my husband and we decided that this is where we would invest our \$100. It didn't solve his problems, but his appreciation for this gift was beyond measure. We shared his story with our family and friends and they were as moved as we were. So we all decided to give a little extra money to help him weather the storm. The spark is now glowing a whole lot brighter.

-Larry and Lorrie B.

Our 19 year old son (Isaiah) was diagnosed with Stage 2 Hodgkin's Lymphoma on March 17, 2016. He was a freshman in college and a member of the college football team. As you can imagine this was something Isaiah nor us (his parents and brothers) ever thought could or would happen. This proves to us and our selfishness that no one is protected from being diagnosed with the awful disease. The last 9 months has been an amazing journey of faith, love, and prayers from many. We are thankful most of our belief in God, knowing he has a plan for all of us that we cannot change. Isaiah was told he was in remission on November 1st. Isaiah received chemo and radiation treatments at Froedtert Cancer Center in Wauwatosa, the care was outstanding. Going to treatments every other week and observing the multitudes of people fighting cancer was so sad. Our act of random kindness was to share support with two cancer patients. I wrote out two Christmas cards explaining that our son had cancer and is now in remission. That is the power of prayer and our faith that helped us on Isaiah's journey. That we know they are going through a difficult time and that we are praying for their healing. The money is a gift for you this Christmas to add brightness to your dreary days. Matt and I wondered how we would select two cancer patients. It all happened naturally. We pulled in the cancer center parking ramp and parked next to a patient that was just arriving. She had a scarf around her head and appeared to be very young. Matt and I looked at one another and knew right away we wanted to give her one of the cards. I got out of the car and went up to her and said I have something for you and handed her the card. She said "Thank You." I told her I would like her to open it, she did. Her reaction was unbelief and tears. A hug came instantaneously. Her husband also expressed his unbelief and hugged both Matt and myself. We wished them a blessed Christmas and told them they are in our prayers. Our reaction: the internal heartfelt emotions-We can't put into words. "JOY JOY JOY down in our hearts" best describes how we felt. Our next stop was the chemo treatment floor. Here it was a little more difficult to pin point someone since there are also family and friend that accompany patients. A nurse came out to escort a patient in for his treatment, so we went up to him and his wife and said we have something for them. We handed him the card and he said "Thank You." We asked him to open it....he also was amazed and speechless. The look in his eyes was all that you need to see to know we made his day; hugs were offered by both him and his wife. We heard the nurse ask as we walked away if they know us. He said "no." The nurses replied with "Wow that is amazing." We left Froedtert feeling absolutely breathless. That we gave two patients JOY was the best feeling ever.

-Matt and Susan B.

Cindy and I came to know David, a 65-year-old African American man with limited resources, several months ago, through our church, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Between services one Sunday at our Madison campus, I noticed this man in the narthex and approached him with a greeting. Soon another parishioner introduced himself to David and then to other members of the congregation, while actively encouraging him to worship with us each Sunday. This man certainly stood out in our congregation of “the frozen chosen,” which features lots of white folks. It soon became clear that David enjoyed Good Shepherd as he started regularly attending our third service, which features praise band music with jazz-features—trumpet, guitars, and drums. Between worship services on December 11, we noticed David standing in the narthex with a beat-up guitar case at his feet. Since I was standing next to our church’s music director Ben, I asked him about David and the guitar. Ben told me that David had always dreamed of learning to play the guitar, and that the guitar was a “loaner.” John, who leads the third service praise band, had volunteered to give David guitar lessons. John, son of the late Doc Dehaven, a well-known jazz musician and music teacher, is certainly well equipped for this task. So I went back to church to connect with David after the third service was over. I approached him as he was meeting with John at the front of the church. We settled into the pew and struck up a conversation. I told him I’d like him to use the S.P.A.R.K. card to buy a guitar. We talked some about his life. He said that he had experienced some difficult times. He had gotten a high school equivalency degree while in prison and had held a variety of jobs since then. He had decided to try out our church because he lived quite close to it, and was surprised at how he enjoyed the warmth of its fellowship. By the next Sunday, David had purchased a nice Gibson guitar and was practicing daily. Once the holiday season has passed, we plan on hosting David for a meal at our home. The S.P.A.R.K. program increases our awareness of people we encounter every day who could benefit from a concrete expression of kindness. In this case, it helped us open a door to what many would see as an unlikely friendship.

-Jeff and Cindy J.

Sue Rosek is the foundation of the office in which I work. She consistently puts students, colleagues, and family members before her own personal and professional needs. She regularly spends her own money buying treats, gifts, cards, and candy for our students. Sue never forgets a birthday or any special occasion. She is always struggling with her physical health and consistently supports family members through their own personal difficulties. I presented this S.P.A.R.K. gift to Sue in an effort to show my appreciation for all that Sue does to better the lives of those around her. It makes my heart swell with love and appreciation to present this small token of thanks to Sue. She is such a deserving person and I am so very happy to show my thanks through this gesture supported by the S.P.A.R.K. Society.

-Joan B.

We became aware of a young father of two and husband who had become involved in illegal drugs through his place of employment. Unfortunately, his employer encourages workers to use drugs so they could work harder (it's physically demanding job) and longer hours. His family intervened and helped remove him from this situation. He voluntarily stopped using the drugs and went through withdrawal. He terminated his employment with this company knowing that this was not a healthy environment for him nor his family. After some soul searching, he decided to start a furniture making business of his own. Inspired by his great-grandfather who did this, he is now beginning to make tables, benches and other items and selling them. Before Christmas, we decided to financially help him by making a financial gift to help him start his business. Along with a financial donation from us, we gave him the Spark gift card, noting it was from our financial advisor. As he and his wife read the card we gave them explaining our desire to give a little seed money to help start his furniture business, they were visibly moved. He spoke of not only the financial support but also the emotional encouragement for him to start his business. As of now, he is drug-free and pursuing his dream of making furniture and earning a living to support his family.

-Rick and Dianne V.

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Actually, this S.P.A.R.K. started last summer, 2016, though we did not realize it. Doing various types of volunteer work in our community helped to become more aware of needs of others fairly close by. One phase of helping others out was to help a Catholic Priest who had previously served in Guatemala, Venezuela, Africa and elsewhere get settled locally. From him I have seen tremendous leadership and humility. After helping him to obtain a bed, matters, sheets, etc., I kept in close contact and soon he told me of others he was serving who were very poor and in need of basic necessities. I did not know until the end of fall that somehow 22 people were supplied with beds, etc. who had previously been sleeping on the floor. When the S.P.A.R.K. gift card arrived I asked this same priest if he knew of anyone who needed some help via this gift card. I told him suggestions of how it could be used and showed him the information sent with the S.P.A.R.K. gift card. He said he knew of some who could use some help and he asked me if it could be divided up in 4 parts so that more than 1 could receive this kind of gesture. I told him "yes," we could make that happen. I told him I would need to give a report but that it did not have to contain names or addresses etc. I attempted to give the priest the 4 \$25.00 Kwik Trip gift cards that we had turned the \$100.00 S.P.A.R.K. card into. He asked me to keep the cards and go with him to deliver them along with other items he wished to share. He wanted the recipients to see that others in the general community cared about them. I agreed to do so and we looked forward to going to their homes with our Priest but schedules and weather etc. did not allow that to happen. Our Priest told me the money was going to 4 families-3 of who were single working mothers but poor. He did give me their first names but I will not list them. The four cards went to a total of 4 households with 10 children. In one of those households the mother was pregnant but lost the baby in November. In a fourth household there is a mother and father and 4 sons. One of the sons is very sick. He is a teenager who has to travel to Milwaukee for treatments on his brain. He has no blood circulation in one large part of his brain. They are poor, sad, and struggling. Our priest said the treatments are very hard for the youth to withstand. I have met his son and he is very kind. We are humbled to be a part of sharing and caring for our sisters and brothers in need. Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this act of love and kindness.

-John and Elaine M.

I passed my S.P.A.R.K. card to the Humane Society of Dane County and matched it with toys, treats, and cleaning supplies.

-Richard K.

We have a friend in a very difficult family situation as she tries to raise a teenage daughter alone. With limited employment opportunities in the geographic area where she lives, this allowed her to have a much nicer Christmas with her daughter. It would have been a very bleak Christmas without this.

-Bruce H.

The "Spark" led to a request for others to donate via their website to raise enough money for a security deposit for a family (\$500). That was raised (plus some) and the spark card is being used to purchase items for that family to move in which are items that are not donated but family needs to maintain apartment life out of shelter.

-Beverly S.

I've been delivering Meals on Wheels (a lunch delivery to individuals in need) for several years now. I choose to deliver the same routes so I can get to know the recipients and they see a familiar face. One of my recipients is in a wheelchair. She shared with me that her brother lives in a nursing home about an hour north of Madison. Her brother had a birthday, his 92nd, between Christmas and New Year's and she wanted to visit him. Being in a wheelchair, the cost to get her there was quite high so I gave her my card to lessen her personal expense.

-Mary B.

We were able to help the CART program. This program is the Cambridge Area Resource Team that began three years ago. The team is made up of members of the local community and churches who saw that there was a local resource effort needed to address the needs of Cambridge residents. CART strives to provide confidential assistance that brings together resources to Cambridge neighbors, families, individuals, elderly, and homeless to help meet basic human needs.

-Robert and Janet K.

I met Daniel while volunteering at the local food pantry. He and his wife and five children were having a very difficult time since he lost his job. I shared his story with my husband and we decided that this is where we would invest our \$100. It didn't solve his problems, but his appreciation for this gift was beyond measure. We shared his story with our family and friends and they were as moved as we were. So we all decided to give a little extra money to help him weather the storm. The spark is now glowing a whole lot brighter.

-Larry and Lorrie B.

We have been involved with the Road Home organization for the past 10 years. This amazing organization helps to change the lives of homeless families by providing shelter, helping with employment, transportation, childcare, and healthcare. Our church serves as a host site for these homeless families and every time that we help unload a small truck that is filled with meager belongings of 3-5 families; we are humbled. They come with so little, yet their hopes of staying together as families and finding stable homes and jobs is inspiring. So we chose to create a spark with this organization in hopes that it would help another family find their permanent home, to set down some roots, and to feel that they are safe and belong somewhere that they can call HOME.

-Bob and Kris C.

The Primrose School of Middleton helped create a S.P.A.R.K. with the Pajama Program. Every child has the right to a secure and safe night where they can release the stress from the day. However, many children in the United States go to sleep and their bedtime is missing something. For children who live through unstable living situations, the treasured bedtime ritual is unknown. At the Pajama Program, it is their goal to deliver good nights with an intention of providing good days. They accomplish this with magical gifts of pajamas and books, ordinary objects that transform bedtime into a ritual of love, warmth, imagination, and fun. In addition to chapters all over the nation, the Pajama Program holds a chapter in the Madison, WI area that Primrose School of Middleton was able to donate to. As the leader in early education and care, we understand the importance of young children being able to receive a good night's sleep and being able to wake up feeling safe and ready to take on the day. To help reach children beyond school, we donated ten pairs of pajamas for children, age's infant through ten years old, and ten books. With our donation, we hope to provide a sense of comfort and security for children at bedtime that ensures a peaceful sleep and to awaken with the energy and spirit to make every day positive, happy, and hopeful!

-School

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We were able to help Kally, a mother of a baby born prematurely at the Unity Point Meriter NICU. Her son was born at 23 weeks and 4 days (full term is 40 weeks.) He weighed 1 pound and 4 ounces and was described by his mom as a fighter. He and his family spent 118 days in the NICU on what she said was a roller coaster journey. Kally wanted to do something to help other babies in the NICU in honor of her sons 1st birthday and the following is what she posted on Facebook that we contributed to-

"When you have a baby that small and fragile there is little handling of that baby that you are able to do and as a parent it is incredibly difficult not to be able to hold them and comfort them, watching them through the flexi glass (incubator), endure test after test, but one of the hardest parts of the day was always the end, we would do his 6 p.m. cares and wait till he fell asleep and make the long walk to the car. One of the things that the NICU had was a device called the 'The Zaky.' It is a soft weighted hand shape device used to position babies and provide the feeling of being cradled. The NICU didn't have enough of these to go around as it was luck of the draw as to which rooms they ended up in."

Kally got a commitment from 'The Zaky' developer to match purchases of the weighted hand if she was able to sell 10 hands at \$59 a piece. With our donation and others, she has reached her goal of 10 hands and the company will match for a total of 20 hands which is enough with the existing hands for every baby to have 'The Zaky.'

-Rod and Monica H.

My Wife and I had looked for an opportunity to present the money given to us to help an individual that may benefit from this gift at the moment. However, this opportunity did not present itself at the time. Instead we chose to give a donation to NAMI – The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Dane County. We chose this primarily due to the work they do to help those affiliated with mental illness in our community. Both Chris and I have had experiences in our families of mental illness and we are very much aware of the devastating affects it can have with all involved. We have experienced family members who have suffered with anxiety, depression, dementia, attention deficit and suicide. We are keenly aware of these afflictions through our professional work as therapists in the community and we know that no one is immune from mental health issues and their affects. We work hard to help remove the stigmatism that many people experience from mental illness and look for opportunities to help others and share the personal experiences we have encountered ourselves. We are pleased to have the opportunity to give a donation to the National Alliance for the Mental Ill or Dane County - NAMI.

-Craig B. and Chris H.

I donated my gift card to the Colonial Club Senior Activity Center, located in Sun Prairie. I was given a tour of the facility and a description of the services they provide. The Colonial Club Senior Activity Center is a 501c3 organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being and independence of older adults. Serving northeast Dane County since 1970, the Colonial Club offers a wide variety of social services, continuing education and opportunities for socialization to older adults and their families. Communities served include Sun Prairie, Cottage Grove, Marshall, Medina, Deerfield, Bristol, Burke and York. "Everything we do is designed to keep people in their homes for as long as safely possible," said Bob Power, Executive Director. Whether it's providing compassionate care in the adult day center, in-home support, transportation or case management services, the Colonial Club relies of grants, fees and donations to operate. Another valued service offered is the nutrition program. Through this program, congregate noon meals are offered daily at the Colonial Club and Colonial View Apartments. A very important extension of the nutrition program is the home-delivered meal program. Like all of the meals, home delivered meals are prepared fresh daily in the Colonial Club kitchen and delivered to area residents who are homebound. This gift card donation will be used to purchase some new items that will help keep the meal fresh and warm.

-Al and Holly F.

Our foster son and his mom have been living at the YWCA for almost 2 years. They have provided a stable place for them to live, and helped mom find longer term supportive housing that will help her connect with available services and keep her son in a single school, where he is doing well. His life will be so different if they keep stable housing and schooling. We know the YWVA also for its anti-racism work. The organization is some of the best work in the eastern area.

-Juscha and Steve R.H.

New Morning Nursery School is a cooperative school for children ages 2-6. It is a non-profit organization which has served families in Madison since 1972. The school's curriculum focus on social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, problem solving, self-reliance and respect for others with the guidance of teachers and through play based learning.

-Jack and Melissa W.

We had a discussion as a family about how we could best "start a spark." We decided to do something local and something global. For local, we decided to support St Vincent de Paul. For global, we decided to support Combat Blindness International. Both organizations help the less fortunate.

-Dhavan and Christine S.G.

Our story begins two years ago on Christmas Eve. Surrounded by all of the Christmas chaos, we decided to take a break and grabbed our skates, hockey sticks, and winter clothes, and headed out to go ice skating in Madison. Just as we were about to arrive at the outdoor rink, the Wisconsin weather decided to do what it does best, and prove the weathermen wrong. What was supposed to be a snowy afternoon spent skating, turned into a wet rainy one that had to be enjoyed indoors. Not letting the weather put a damper on our afternoon, we decided to quick call and put in a reservation at Bonefish Grill for lunch. When we arrived we explained to the hostess that we had made a reservation, but she couldn't seem to find our name. When looking back at the number we called, it was discovered that we had made a reservation for Bonefish Grill in Madison, Mississippi. This was just the beginning of some problems that we would encounter on this trip. Luckily, we were able to wait just a few minutes and get seated anyways. Then it came time to pay the bill, but remember back to when we rushed out the door with nothing but our clothes and gear? Well, we didn't think that we needed money to play hockey. We did not realize that our money was back at home until it came time to pay the bill. So after searching through pockets and the car, we realized that cup holder change wasn't going to be enough to pay for a lunch. However, we didn't realize that the whole time we were frantically trying to come up with a solution and determine how we could tell our waiter that we needed to run over to the bank a few miles away to get some money, a family had been watching. They approached us and said they had it covered. She explained how she once had to struggle to pay the bills being a single mother and how things would get better. What she didn't realize was that this was just the mistake of a family caught up in all of the holiday excitement. As we tried to explain what had actually happened and get their information to pay them back they wouldn't accept it. So they kindly paid our bill, wished us a Merry Christmas, and went on their way. It was a generous gesture that we would never forget. We decided that someday we would pay it forward.

So when this opportunity came along, we knew just what we were going to do. That brings us to this Christmas season. We headed over to Bonefish Grill for our opportunity to pay it forward. It's not every day that you see someone who forgets their wallet or isn't able to pay their bill, but we hoped to at least find a family like ours. Everyone had so much fun searching for a family that we could give some holiday cheer to. It did not take long to spot a family that was very similar to ours. We asked our waiter if he could kindly take over the envelope to them, explaining that we were looking to spread some holiday cheer and wished to remain anonymous. The envelope contained the gift card and a note wishing them a Happy Holidays. The note explained that an anonymous person was paying it forward and covering their meal. Assuming that their bill would be under \$100 the note suggested they treat themselves to a nice dessert and/or brighten their waiter's day with a generous tip. On our way out of the restaurant we could not help but overhear the excitement that was coming from the table that we had sent the gift card over to. We noticed that each and every one of them had a bright smile on their face and a dessert in front of them, and their waiter looked pretty happy too. Operation Spread Some Holiday Cheer had been a success. We really had a great time with our spy mission and hope to do it again next year, and just as the family had inspired us to pay it forward, we are more than confident that the family that we surprised will pay it forward in the future. We hope the chain reaction will go on and on.

-Kathy H.

I was given the spark card by our friend Brandon. I absolutely loved the idea of it and it was refreshing to be given the opportunity to help anyone I wanted. I had two people in mind so I split the card into two \$50.00 donations.

First, our friend Jason returned from a mission's trip on June 18th. He had traveled with Living Water International, a Christian organization that helps communities desperately in need of clean water by implementing participatory, community-based water solutions in developing countries. He was so greatly impacted by his experience that he came home with a goal to run 1,000 miles by the end of 2016. He began running on June 27th and finished his 1,000th mile on Christmas Day. He is raising money to help lessen the financial burden of others who desperately want to go on the next mission trip with Living Water but would otherwise not be able to afford to go. Following is an edited Facebook post from Jason.

"This challenge raised \$1,675 for our water missions! It has been awesome to receive letters, messages and donations along the way. For me this journey started on June 15th. On our mission to El Salvador we ran into some complications and it was going to be tough to finish a well before we had to leave Tres De Anero. I searched for answers in my bible and I kept coming to the passage in 1 corinthians 9:24. Run in such a way as to get the prize. When we left I was happy to have built strong relationships but truthfully I was very depressed about feeling like our mission was incomplete. We arrived home Saturday before Father's Day. It was late and I didn't discuss too many details that night with the family. Especially not the particular bible verse that I kept opening too. On Father's Day when I opened my gifts there was a T-Shirt with the message 1 Corinthians 9:24 run in such a way as to get the prize. Okay God, you've got my attention. On June 27th after thinking about the silent whispers spoken I would require me averaging more miles every week than I had ever done. Okay God, let's do this! Pain began to take over in my knees and lower back and I was really wondering if this could be possible. A lot of praying and tough running followed and the challenge pressed on. As it got later into the fall I only had about 500 miles and knew it was time to start really stretching myself. During that time on a particular run I was doing some praying. I thanked God for this mission I was on and the journey but that I wasn't feeling a connection to the upcoming Nicaragua trip. Ultimately I would go wherever I was called but something didn't feel right, where did he want me to go. The next morning I awoke to a message from my friend John asking, "if we switched from Nicaragua to a return trip to El Salvador would I have an interest in going?" It didn't take me long to respond. The last couple months have just been about prayer and determination to finish this task presented before me. It has been a way to show people that God can do anything in anybody. Faith is real and his whispers are real as well. Sometimes we just need to slow down and pay attention to the signs that he has placed in our lives. I am truly grateful for everything. The letters, messages, words of encouragement."

The second organization that I feel passionate about is Fresh, Safe Start. It is an organization that was founded by a friend who was a victim of domestic violence. There are some wonderful organizations that work to get women and children out of violent conditions but this organization works to help them secure a new start. They help pay for things such as rental deposits, first and second month rent, filling their food pantries, as well as gently used furniture, clothes and other items needed in day to day life.

It was so great to be able to reach out to give to these causes and I was actually motivated to make an additional contribution to my friend Jason. Just hearing how his experience changed his life and how determined he is to make a difference in so many lives now has be considering a trip with Living Water as well.

-Darci and Terry E.

We are so grateful to share the story of Cecelia and her determination to support her daughter's four children after she was no longer able to do so. Cecelia works 2 jobs and cares for her grandchildren who are 12, 10, 6, and 2 years old. She stresses the importance of school and education since she worked at a young age and was not able to graduate from high school. This winter, when Cecelia's daughter could no longer care for her children, Cecelia filed for guardianship and moved to a larger apartment. She was extremely grateful for the S.P.A.R.K. gift card and started to cry as she said her grandchildren all needed winter coats. She says she plans to pay it forward when she is able to provide more financially. Her four grandchildren are loved and care for by Cecelia.

-Amie and Gregg P.

We decided to get in touch with our pastoral care individual through our local church. After explaining S.P.A.R.K., she suggested two families who could benefit from a little "spark." One family consisted of an elderly woman who lived with her very elderly mother. The younger woman was dealing with multiple health issues. The second family was a single mom with three small children, struggling to make ends meet. We split the S.P.A.R.K. card into 2, \$50.00 grocery cards and placed them in a holiday card. The grocery cards were presented to the families by the pastoral care person. Participation in the S.P.A.R.K. program made us realize how fortunate we are, and how many people within our community truly need a helping hand. It was a humbling and extremely satisfying experience!

-Tim and Marry M.

Ignited by Midwest Financial Group

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