



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2029

Blueprint for Continued Success



SPARC'S ORIGIN STORY

Donna Goldbranson, herself the parent of a child with severe and multiple disabilities, was on a tour of the Northern Virginia Training Center when she met Ellen, slumped in a wheelchair, all but ignored. The sight of Ellen tugged at Donna's heart. Ellen's whispered plea, "Please help me," broke Donna's heart and inspired the creation of SPARC - Specially Adapted Resource Clubs.

SPARC'S MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

MISSION

To provide adults with severe and multiple disabilities enduring learning opportunities, social connections, and a rightful and meaningful place in our community.

VISION

To serve the least served in our community.

To provide essential social, educational, and creative programs for the 1% of the population with severe and multiple disabilities who have difficulty working or living in traditional environments.

To offer programs that provide adults with severe and multiple disabilities a fuller and more meaningful life.

CORE VALUES

We believe that every individual has the absolute right:

- to live to their full potential;
- to belong to a community of friends and peers;
- to be taken seriously without derision or contempt;
- to be heard, listened to, and cared for;
- to be encouraged to dream big dreams;
- to aspire to achieve their dreams, and
- to have full and direct participation in all decisions affecting them.

"Nothing About Us Without Us."

EVERY GOAL OF THIS BLUEPRINT FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS IS CONSISTENT WITH AND IN FURTHERANCE OF OUR MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES. TOGETHER THEY ARE OUR NORTH STAR, PROVIDING A TRUE PATH FORWARD.

THE SPARC CHOICE

SPARC was founded in 2006 as an alternative to the existing Medicaid model for day programs available to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities. SPARC has changed the long-term care blueprint for many such adults in Northern Virginia and is a model that could transform the lives of thousands more throughout our region and the United States.

SPARC IS A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO RADICALLY DIFFERENT MODELS

The Medicaid model, in which individuals are isolated and vulnerable in Medicaid-funded facilities at a cost to the taxpayer, according to the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (Fairfax Falls Church CSB), of between \$2,250 and \$2,834 per person per month, plus the cost of transportation. One caregiver tends to a federally mandated minimum of four adults with severe and multiple disabilities. Even with good intentions, caregivers are typically able to provide only absolute necessities - changing diapers, feeding, and medicating.

or

The SPARC model, in which each participant adult with severe and multiple disabilities pays \$750 per month plus the cost of transportation to unlock a world of difference. The participant has the attention and help of their personal caregiver, allowing them to take part in a variety of educational services in the form of leisure learning. As a result, SPARC participants build and strengthen life skills, socialize with peers, simply have fun, and access the tools needed to live a more meaningful and productive life.

Choosing SPARC for day programming should be a simple choice. But it is not. Since almost all of SPARC's target population lives in poverty, many are forced to choose the Medicaid facility with all its limitations because it is paid for from public funds. In accordance with our Mission, Vision, and Core Values, SPARC intends to change that equation. **Wealth should never be a barrier to a life of enrichment and social engagement.**

**IF WE FOLLOW THIS BLUEPRINT FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS, THE SPARC CHOICE
WILL BE THE EASY CHOICE.**

SPARC'S TARGET POPULATION

Severe and multiple disabilities take various forms and have various meanings. Some SPARC participants have developmental delays. Some have intellectual delays. Some have ADD/ADHD, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, spina bifida, and other similar conditions. Most of SPARC's participants need support with daily living activities as they lack social skills, effective verbal communication, basic physical mobility, and the ability to take personal care of themselves. Consequently, many are unable to work or leave home much, and are isolated with few opportunities to interact with their peers. From day one, SPARC has been and will continue to be a quality-of-life day program for this often-neglected population.

The latest U.S. Census disclosed that Northern Virginia is home to approximately 39,000 people (almost twice the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden) with intellectual, cognitive, and/or developmental disabilities. Of that number the:

- a. Arc of Northern Virginia estimated that 1 to 2 percent, as many as 780 adults in Northern Virginia, would benefit from SPARC programming; and
- b. Fairfax Falls Church CSB reported that at any given time approximately 100 adults cannot participate in supported work programs and would choose SPARC if it were free.

These numbers may represent only a portion of the people who would benefit from SPARC. Many adults with severe and multiple disabilities can only work a few hours a week or cannot find work because employers are unwilling to provide the accommodation needed to welcome and support them. Some of these individuals already benefit from their participation in SPARC and many more in Northern Virginia would choose SPARC programming if they could afford it. **That is our challenge.**

THE POTENTIAL POOL OF SPARC PARTICIPANTS IS SUBSTANTIAL.

All SPARC participants receive Supplemental Security Income and are financially in need. Consequently, controlling the cost of providing programming to our service population is vitally important. There are two primary ways to control costs.

First - cut costs associated with owning or leasing brick-and-mortar facilities. SPARC has drastically cut this cost by partnering with Fairfax and Arlington Counties to provide services in four county community centers (McLean, Reston, and Providence in Fairfax County, and Arlington Mill in Arlington County) for free. In addition, The Church of the Good Shepherd in Vienna, VA is an invaluable partner providing economical space for programming several months of the year. SPARC has solved the brick-and-mortar part of the equation.

Second - cut costs associated with SPARC's workforce. Because most of SPARC's program specialists have or are working towards their master's degree in special education, recreational therapy, social work, and other health professions, they are a high-quality, well-trained yet economical workforce. Such a workforce is vital to SPARC's success and is the primary reason our participants enjoy the benefits of their SPARC choice. However, we can still achieve greater cost savings with respect to staffing, without sacrificing quality. This Blueprint for Continued Success explains how we will accomplish that goal.

SPARC'S THERAPEUTIC PROGRAM

A SPARC day is a therapeutic day. Program specialists are trained in a combination of behavioral techniques, awareness, and ability to act on various medical diagnoses. These specialists provide systematic processes that utilize recreation and other activities as interventions to address the assessed needs of SPARC participants with respect to psychological and physical health, recovery, and wellbeing.

The SPARC curriculum is rooted in therapeutic recreation principles that consist of continued education/leisure learning, skill building, exercise, excursions, cooking, music, art, lectures, discussion groups, and much more. SPARC also offers weekly bingo online, a social club, and an Advocate's Advisory Council (AAC). The Council meets with SPARC's Executive Director to discuss issues important to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities, such as universal access. They strategize ways to correct issues, remove barriers, and promote their ideas. The AAC also contributes their experience and expertise to various sub-committees of the Fairfax County Long-Term Care Coordinating Council and to other advocacy groups.

SPARC maintains the same daily engagement level with trained professionals that its participants experienced in high school. SPARC presumes competence based on George Engel's Biopsychosocial model that requires an understanding of biological factors, psychological factors, and social factors before a person's medical condition can be entirely understood. Each participant receives the opportunity, time, and accommodation to independently choose among daily living activities. For example, SPARC provides assistive technology and mechanisms for each participant to make their own choices instead of passively allowing others to make those choices for them.

SPARC organizes meetings by a scaffold of learning opportunities which gives each staff member the opportunity to remediate in a non-threatening way. Participants make their own choices of activities, all of which are designed to build skills, competencies, and confidence. Group settings with friends reinforce turn taking, active listening and cooperation. Assistive technologies, such as letter boards, pictures boards and speech synthesizers enable non-verbal participants to express their choices.

SPARC delivers a unique program to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities because it:

- is designed to serve the most vulnerable individuals in our community.
- cost effectively combines funding streams from private and public sources.
- impacts participants, families, and caregivers during and after program hours, since SPARC facilitates learning, building community, and enriching lives.
- provides a powerful solution to meeting the needs of its underserved population and should be available throughout Northern Virginia in publicly operated community centers and other appropriate public spaces, to help localities provide services to all their residents, including their forgotten adults with severe and multiple disabilities.
- addresses the needs of young adults with severe and multiple disabilities who have aged out of the special education support provided by the K-12 system.
- permits family caregivers to return to the workforce knowing their loved one is receiving the human interaction and attention they need to feel more a part of life and of community.
- provides programs rich in individuality, motivation, creativity, thoughtfulness, and friendship, and that nurture the alchemy of togetherness.
- puts into practice in every aspect of its operations and programming the principle “**Nothing About Us Without Us**”, thereby making all decisions that integrally affect the SPARC population with the full and direct involvement of our participants.

SPARC delivers a unique program to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities who are not eligible for other community-based programs because SPARC's population is:

- Too old for similar programs serving younger people;
- Too disabled to be successful in vocational training in the Medicaid-sponsored employment programs or sheltered workshops; and
- Too disabled to thrive in Medicaid funded programs where one caregiver tends to four participants.

At SPARC centers, adults with challenges of all kinds come together throughout the day. They form friendships. They make choices. SPARC creates an environment in which everyone shares because living, learning, working, and socializing are fun, making SPARC the best model for long-term care for adults with severe and multiple disabilities.



EVERY PERSON, NO MATTER THEIR ABILITY OR DISABILITY, DESERVES THE CHANCE TO LIVE THEIR BEST AND MOST MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLING LIFE.

SPARC IMPACT – FINANCIAL SAVINGS TO TAXPAYERS

SPARC is unique among nonprofits. In addition to providing services not otherwise available to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities anywhere in our service area, SPARC's day programs save the taxpayers conservatively millions of dollars.

First, if SPARC closed its doors today, then taxpayers in Northern Virginia would bear the increased costs to provide programming and services to SPARC's young adults with severe and multiple disabilities that utterly fail to meet the quality-of-life programming and services offered by SPARC.

The alternatives to SPARC are expensive for taxpayers. According to the Fairfax Falls Church CSB, Fairfax County pays program enhancement funds for an individual who has obtained Medicaid waivers or is on the Medicaid waiver wait list to attend a Medicaid provider between \$27,000 and \$34,000 per individual per year, plus \$9,000 per individual per year for transportation. If SPARC's 50 participants received services from Medicaid providers – even at the lowest end of the range and without factoring in subsidized transportation costs - then the additional taxpayer cost would be more than **\$1.3 MILLION PER YEAR** for only those individuals already enjoying the benefits of SPARC programming.

The Fairfax Falls Church CSB has estimated 100 people could benefit from SPARC programming. That estimate represents twice the number of people currently attending SPARC and means twice the taxpayer cost, at **\$2.6 MILLION PER YEAR**, plus transportation costs. Notably, the Fairfax Falls Church CSB estimate is far less than The Arc of Northern Virginia's estimate of as many as 780 people well-suited for SPARC programming. Suffice it to say, at \$750 plus transportation a month, SPARC offers enormous value while dramatically improving the lives of SPARC participants.

Second, many SPARC participants live at home for an average of ten years longer than those attending Medicaid funded programs. According to Neuro Brilliant Magazine, the taxpayer cost for one adult to reside in a group home paid

by Medicaid funds ranges between \$65,000 to \$120,000 per year. If, in Northern Virginia, the taxpayer cost for one adult to live in a group home paid by Medicaid funds equals \$65,000, the low end of the range per year, then over ten years there is a potential savings to the taxpayer of \$650,000 per SPARC participant who remains at home. Assuming 100 people in Fairfax County would be best served at SPARC, the potential saving is over **\$65 MILLION FOR THE TEN-YEAR PERIOD.**

Third, engaging day programs are a crucial element in the prevention of social isolation. People who experience social isolation or loneliness have higher risks of morbidity and mortality, cardiovascular disease, stroke, immune system disorders, respiratory illness, and type 2 diabetes. They also have an increased risk of mental and cognitive health conditions including depression, anxiety, suicide, addiction, cognitive decline, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease. Regional studies have shown a reduction in Emergency Room visits **AS HIGH AS 41%.**

TAXPAYER AND MEDICAL COST SAVINGS - ENORMOUS

QUALITY-OF-LIFE IMPROVEMENT – PRICELESS



SPARC IMPACT – QUALITY OF LIFE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

In January 2023, we implemented an impact study based on Zones of Regulation. The Zones of Regulation framework and curriculum teaches participants scaffolded skills toward developing a metacognitive pathway to build awareness of feelings/internal state and to utilize a variety of tools and strategies for regulation, prosocial skills, self-care, and overall wellness.

The Zones of Regulation method includes exploring tools and strategies for mindfulness, sensory integration, movement, thinking strategies, wellness, and healthy connection with others. This method provides a common language and compassionate framework to support positive mental health and skill development for all, while serving as an inclusion strategy for neurodiverse learners who have experienced trauma, and/or have social, emotional, and behavioral development specific needs.

Each participant identifies their feelings on a scale of 1- 5 (great mood, happy, sad, irritated, or angry) and then discusses their responses with staff. At the end of the day, staff performs a second check concerning the person's feelings and the day's interactions. Daily check-ins also provide information that might indicate a referral to the participant's support team outside of SPARC.

SPARC is also committed to achieving individual-specific SMART goals which are tied to developing soft skills in lieu of employment training to better navigate daily living and to experience a fulfilling life that boosts mental and emotional wellbeing. It is difficult for people with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities to cultivate life skills unless they can socialize in a community of their peers. We design SPARC's activities to help participants (a) discover their individual gifts and talents, and (b) learn essential daily living skills that create confidence in their ability to live more independently and handle challenges.

Each participant annually identifies a SMART goal from one of the following areas of focus: transportation; communication; recreation; independence with activities of daily living; academics/schooling; or employment. The participant then lists supports and steps to accomplish the goal. We measure success through

one-on-one interviews which include the participant's self-grade with a written explanation of:

- Why they chose that grade;
- What they did well;
- What they need to improve;
- Whether they need to seek additional support; or
- Whether the goal needs revision.

We conducted this process last August. Four months later, SPARC participants succeeded 70% of the time, a significantly effective percentage.

Measuring progress with adults who have severe and multiple disabilities is difficult at best because their conditions often include an inability to physically communicate and often result in isolation where non communication becomes the norm. In addition, "severely disabled" often means that the underlying illness continues to worsen, without any hope of improving. Notwithstanding, many participants have come to SPARC consistently and continuously for numerous years and readily credit SPARC's impact on the vastly improved quality of their lives.

We must be creative when evaluating SPARC's program and measuring the learning of soft skills, independence, and unvarnished happiness. At times we learn volumes merely from asking the simplest questions. For example, was the participant happier when leaving than when arriving. Every day is a successful day when the answer to that question is "yes".

**THIS BLUEPRINT FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS PROVIDES THE PATHWAY TO A
HAPPIER AND MORE MEANINGFUL LIFE.**

- “Before SPARC, I felt I had aged out of life when I turned 22.”
~ **Justin Dolan, a SPARC participant**
- “SPARC is an outside...the box day program that meets an individual with physical disabilities wherever they are on any given day.... I belong because I can share my ideas and my opinion matters.... I look forward to learning and doing new things with friends.”
~ **Katherine Montgomery, a SPARC participant, and member of SPARC’s Board of Directors**
- “Without SPARC, Adam never would have had the opportunity to make friends, participate in beneficial activities and create a satisfying life for himself.... [My husband and I] made a vow to one another that we would provide Adam with anything and everything possible for him to live as typical a life as possible. And SPARC has allowed that to happen.”
~ **Merle Toobin, mother of SPARC participant Adam Toobin.**



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Located in Northern Virginia, SPARC is uniquely placed to tap into the rich web of philanthropic organizations, business entities, and higher education institutions as partners to provide SPARC programming and services. To take full advantage of our region's opportunities, SPARC created an infrastructure necessary to attract significant partnerships. This infrastructure included:

(a) governing and other corporate documents that are commensurate with a substantive charitable organization,

(b) a diverse and talented Board of Directors comprised of caring regional leaders,

(c) a stable and sound financial condition verified by audited financial statements, and

(d) a bold, visionary, and realistic strategic plan.

We have created such an infrastructure and are prepared to be a regional partner.

To further SPARC's Mission and in compliance with SPARC's Vision and Core Values, SPARC will focus its creativity and talents, its efforts and energies, and its resources and perseverance, on achieving three overarching goals:

- **To expand:**

(a) SPARC'S current population to include more young adults with severe and multiple disabilities who live in areas currently served by the existing five SPARC centers,

(b) SPARC's in person reach to include young adults with severe and multiple disabilities who live in Northern Virginia jurisdictions not currently served, and

(c) SPARC's virtual reach to include young adults with severe and multiple disabilities who are confined to home, live too far from a SPARC center to physically attend, or have no means of transportation.

- **To generate new financial resources necessary not only to sustain, but to expand SPARC's operations, through partnerships with business, foundations, and government, including to monetize and replicate the SPARC program for dissemination throughout the country for a fee.**
- **To partner with one or more educational institutions and to create a Clinical Advisory Board comprised of, among others, a licensed social worker (MSW or CLSW), recreational therapist (MSTR), and special ed teacher (M.Ed.). Educational partnerships will result in:**
 - (a)** SPARC programs incorporating the most innovative ideas in special education, therapeutic recreation, social work, and other health professional fields,
 - (b)** SPARC having the opportunity to create new relationships with existing donors of our educational partners, thereby increasing fund raising to sustain and expand SPARC operations,
 - (c)** SPARC having tools to better measure achievement and success,
 - (d)** SPARC's accomplished and capable staff being guided and supervised by health care professionals comprising our Clinical Advisory Board so that staff will receive credit for their work at SPARC, as approved by their institution, and
 - (e)** through internships, clinical work, and coursework requirements, SPARC having a cost effective and readily available pool of talented and trained staff to lead SPARC programming, thereby significantly reducing costs, and making available significantly more scholarships for those in need.

GOAL 1: EXPANSION

Objective 1: To develop a comprehensive public relations, marketing, and community outreach plan to increase awareness of SPARC in Northern Virginia and of the needs of the population SPARC serves.

Objective 2: To expand the breadth and reach of SPARC through the opening of at least one SPARC center to serve Loudoun County and at least one SPARC center to serve Fairfax County's Route 1 Corridor and the nearby City of Alexandria.

Objective 3: To expand the breadth and reach of SPARC through the availability of virtual SPARC.

GOAL 2: INCREASED REVENUE

Objective 4: For each year of this Blueprint for Continued Success, to develop partnerships with at least four significant donors, the result of which is increased revenue for stability, sustainability, and expansion of services.

Objective 5: To expand or develop a funding source with a governmental entity (Federal, state, or local), the result of which is increased revenue for stability, sustainability, and expansion of services.

Objective 6: To expand SPARC's Board of Directors to: (a) be more diverse and inclusive, thereby better representing the community at large and the SPARC community; and (b) maximize Board of Director effectiveness, engagement, and enthusiasm to provide bold leadership to accomplish this Blueprint for Continued Success and shoulder increased fund-raising responsibility and activity.

Objective 7: To monetize SPARC's program by franchise or otherwise to increase revenue and to provide programming not only across the Commonwealth, but across the nation.

Objective 8: To create a fully funded scholarship program so that every adult with severe and multiple disabilities can attend SPARC.

GOAL 3: PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Objective 9: To update all SPARC lesson plans and programming to ensure that SPARC continues to offer innovative and visionary programming to meet its participants' needs.

Objective 10: To establish micro-certification or badge programs for students in therapeutic recreation, special education, social work, or other health professions to better serve SPARC participants at a more economical cost.

Objective 11: To develop relationships between SPARC and funding sources that already exist with the institutions of higher education and to increase revenue from the institution's use of SPARC programming as part of their clinical work and coursework.

Objective 12: To utilize the institutions' expertise: (a) to find and apply for available grants and other avenues of revenue sources; and (b) to create better program evaluation tools.

Objective 13: To guide and supervise our accomplished and capable staff by health care specialists comprising our Clinical Advisory Board so that our staff receives credit for their work at SPARC, if approved by their institution.

“We hope that SPARC and [Shenandoah University] develop a partnership that will be transformative for both SPARC’s young adults with severe disabilities and our students in the health professions. Outcomes of this partnership will be a therapeutic workforce to sustain SPARC programming, and clinical work for SU students in an interdisciplinary field with hands-on learning opportunities resulting in an individualized and engaging education.”

~ **Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons, President, Shenandoah University.**

As a practical matter these 13 objectives form a multi-year plan since some depend on others to be satisfied and some will take more time to accomplish. We have started implementing many of the objectives and meeting our goals. Throughout 2022 and 2023, we developed many new significant relationships in the business, philanthropic and educational sectors.

EVERY OBJECTIVE IS SUPPORTED BY AN ACTION PLAN WITH BENCHMARKS TO MEASURE OUR PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THIS BLUEPRINT FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS.

GOAL 1: EXPANSION – OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

Our belief in our mission requires that we expand SPARC so that every young adult with severe and multiple disabilities has an opportunity to experience learning, social connections, and a rightful place in our community, without disparagement or ridicule. We have already begun the expansion process.

The Board recently approved a comprehensive public relations, marketing, and community outreach plan to increase awareness of SPARC in Northern Virginia and of the needs of the population SPARC serves. The plan provides for, among other things:

- a. an enhanced social media presence;
- b. a revitalized website including messaging around corporate giving and identification of SPARC's Board and staff;
- c. the continued publishing of SPARC's newsletter;
- d. the publishing of a blog on SPARC's website; and
- e. a series of videos and slideshows introducing SPARC to the philanthropic community.

Added awareness of SPARC in Northern Virginia should ensure that every SPARC center currently operating is operating to capacity and with a diverse clientele.

To lay the groundwork for the opening of a SPARC Loudoun County center, and to increase awareness of SPARC in Loudoun County and of the needs of the population SPARC serves, we are meeting and speaking with Virginia and Loudoun County officials, the Loudoun County economic development authority, institutions of higher education with a stake in Loudoun County, and the Loudoun County philanthropic community so they are integrally aware of SPARC and the service and programs SPARC provides. With assistance from Phyllis Randall, Loudoun County Chair At-Large, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, and from economic development officials, we are optimistic that a SPARC center in Loudoun County will be operational before the end of the fourth quarter of 2024,

and that the Loudoun center will result from a SPARC partnership with Loudoun County and an institution of higher education.

With the help and at the urging of Fairfax County officials, including Jeff McKay, Chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and with the full support of Justin Wilson, Mayor of Alexandria, we will open at least one SPARC center in the Route 1 Corridor of Fairfax County to serve the Route 1 Corridor and the Alexandria catchment area. We are optimistic that the center will be operational by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

“As a social and service enterprise, SPARC provides an environment where young adults with severe disabilities can build relationships and community.”

- Justin M. Wilson, Mayor, City of Alexandria

Virtual programming requires a dedicated revenue stream to support operating costs and a significant investment to purchase integrated AV systems which will provide participants with a robust, interactive virtual experience. COVID, by making virtual SPARC a necessity for all participants, taught us that if an individual with severe and multiple disabilities is unable to leave home, lives too far from a SPARC center to physically attend or has no means of transportation, then, in accordance with our Mission, we must provide our quality-of-life programming to that individual by all possible means.

We have begun the process of cultivating philanthropic, commercial, educational, and governmental partners to fund the staffing and launch of virtual SPARC by the end of the third quarter of 2026.

GOAL 2: INCREASE REVENUE – OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

Young adults with severe and multiple disabilities have been largely ignored and allowed to free fall through a gaping hole in the social safety net. We will not allow them to go unnoticed and unserved.

“The goal is not to avoid falling or needing help. The goal is to be seen, asked, heard, believed, valued as we are, allowed to exist in these exact bodies, invited to the party, and encouraged to dance however we want to.”

~Rebekah Taussig, *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body*

We partnered with several major corporations and foundations to increase financial support for operations. Seeking new relationships has not stopped our efforts to steward our long-term partnerships with those donors who are intricately responsible for SPARC’s 17-year existence. We recognize however that SPARC’s stability, sustainability, and growth must be funded by a more substantial and reliable revenue stream. Consequently, we are on a three-prong offensive to develop partnerships with the significant business community, major foundations and educational institutions located in Northern Virginia, with the result of increased revenue by at least 15% over the prior year for expansion of services by the end of the first quarter of each of the five years of this Blueprint for Continued Success.

As we draft this Blueprint for Continued Success, we are planning our first major fundraising event to be held in the fourth quarter of 2023. In keeping with the principle “**Nothing About Us Without Us**,” the SPARC population requested that this fundraising event be a gala in which they would dress in their finest, socialize, laugh, and just have fun. Although festivities are plentiful for most adults, they are rare for most young adults with severe and multiple disabilities. SPARC’s population named the event the “Gratitude Gala”, because they are enormously grateful that people will come to share their dream. We have strategically chosen business entities and public figures whose principles align with SPARC’s Mission, Vision, and Core Values with which to partner in this annual

event where we will honor at least one individual with our Hero Award. We anticipate holding the gala in the fourth quarter of each of the five years of this Blueprint for Continued Success and every fourth quarter thereafter.

To be stable, sustainable, and effective, SPARC must affect public policy with the goal that SPARC is included in the Federal, State, or a local budget. At the urging of both U.S. Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner and Fairfax County officials, in April 2023, we submitted a request for Congressional Development Funding in the amount of approximately \$1 million to open three SPARC centers, two in Fairfax County's Route 1 Corridor and one in Leesburg, Loudoun County. If granted, the funds will ensure that the three SPARC centers will be operational in the time frame for a SPARC presence in the Route 1 Corridor and in Loudoun County as more particularly set forth above.

To coincide with the 2023-2024 Virginia budget preparation, we met with officials:

- (a) on the Senate Finance Committee;
- (b) representing the Northern Virginia counties;
- (c) on the Disabilities Commission; and
- (d) in the governor's office.

We are hopeful SPARC's \$250,000, that State Senator Janet Howell, Chair of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee, was instrumental in including in the Senate budget, will survive conference. Whether SPARC is ultimately a line item in the Commonwealth's 2023-2024 final budget, we will return to Richmond during every budget cycle to increase awareness of SPARC and make allies to advance the needs of SPARC and our community.

"SPARC is filling a hole in our safety net. I view it as a kind of pilot project for the state."

~ State Senator Janet Howell

Seeking permanent local public funding, we met with (a) Chris Leonard, Fairfax County's Deputy County Executive for Health, Housing and Human Services, (b) the leadership of the Fairfax Fall Church CSB and of Neighborhood and Community Services, and (c) each of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. SPARC should rightfully be funded by public monies because SPARC provides a vital public service to constituents who are all too often forgotten and left to free fall through the gaping hole in the social safety net. Because Fairfax County's Neighborhood and Community Services was created to:

"Promote... the well-being of individuals, families and communities by providing a variety of recreation, educational and developmental programs and services; by facilitating community engagement to identify areas of need and enhance countywide capacity for serving those needs; and by connecting residents with a continuum of county- and community- based resources that promote equity and create positive outcomes for people of all ages and abilities,"

Neighborhood and Community Services' Budget would provide a perfect permanent home for SPARC. By the end of the fourth quarter 2024, we will know the success of our current endeavors. Until SPARC is publicly funded, we will continue outreach to and enhance our relationship with local officials.

From the halls of the Fairfax County Government Center to the halls of our State and Federal Capitals, we have advocated for SPARC to receive public funds and to expand our presence and public officials' knowledge of our unique program that serves a neglected and often forgotten population. We will continue these efforts throughout the term of this Blueprint for Continued Success.

However, our Blueprint for Continued Success must begin at home. We have expanded SPARC's Board of Directors to be more diverse and inclusive, so that the needs of the community at large and of the SPARC community are better understood and represented, making the delivery of services and programming better suited to our population. Expansion of SPARC's Board will also maximize the effectiveness, engagement, and enthusiasm of the Board to better fundraise and to free up much needed staff time to do the life enriching work of SPARC. We have also realigned the Board's committee structure so that Board members can

devote time to specific areas of SPARC's operations that are of particular interest to them.

Since 2006, SPARC has developed an invaluable asset in its lesson plans and programming. We frequently receive requests from across the country about replicating SPARC. We believe the time is right to generate value from these assets and from making SPARC available throughout the country. We are assuring the safety of our intellectual property and copyright protection of our written property, both a prerequisite to expanding SPARC beyond Northern Virginia.

Increased revenues will add to the stability, sustainability, and expansion of SPARC, and will assure that every young adult with severe and multiple disabilities will never be turned away because of financial need. We envision a fully funded and self-sustaining SPARC scholarship program by the end of the fourth quarter 2029.

"Too often we underestimate the power of ... the smallest act of caring...which has the potential to turn a life around."

~ **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

GOAL 3: PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION – OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

For young adults with severe and multiple disabilities to thrive, SPARC must partner with at least one institution of higher learning that offers course work in special education, therapeutic recreation, health sciences, and/or social work fields. That partnership will add stability to and increase the integrity of SPARC's programming for the following reasons.

- Institutions of higher learning make advances in the supportive structure and continued education that SPARC's participants require after they graduate from the K-12 school system and begin adult life. Their quality of life depends in large measure on the programs and services SPARC provides. That is why we must adhere to best practices and incorporate innovative and bold ideas into our programming. Currently, SPARC partners with the Fairfax County Department of Therapeutic Recreation to assure the best and most up-to-date programming. Assistance from Therapeutic Recreation is invaluable but is tenuous as personnel or policy directives may change. Partnering with one or more institutions of higher learning, where the institution offers its graduate students course credit, clinical internships, badges, and/or certifications because of their work experience with SPARC, makes SPARC a more integral part of the institution, thereby assuring continuity.
- SPARC programming and staffing needs will benefit from associating with educational institutions. Educational partnerships will provide SPARC with a steady stream of talented and well-trained staff as SPARC programming becomes an integral part of the institution's required clinical hours and course work. SPARC, with the help of its Clinical Advisory Board, which we will establish as soon as possible, will become the vehicle to train future professionals entering the workforce after obtaining their degree, certificate, or badge. SPARC's commitment to workforce preparation and readiness will permit SPARC to apply for those workforce grants currently unavailable as SPARC can do little if any workforce development for its participants because, for the most part, they are too disabled to work.

SPARC will be a fierce competitor with the for profit and government sectors to hire qualified, talented, educated, and caring staff.

- Partnering with an institution of higher learning will provide stability of funding and increased revenue. We envision several ways that such a partnership would benefit SPARC financially. For example, funds could flow to SPARC with respect to:
 - (a) students seeking a certificate or badge to provide programming for individuals with severe and multiple disabilities;
 - (b) clinical hours and course work in a rare interdisciplinary, collaborative, student-centered, individualized, and hands-on course of study; or
 - (c) as a license fee for the institution's use of SPARC programming and lessons.
- Institutions of higher learning attract large monetary support whether from alumni, business, philanthropy, or government. By partnering with institutions of higher education, SPARC will tap into that support from donors who would otherwise not be sympathetic to an unaffiliated program.
- SPARC's programming success is difficult to quantify or evaluate because individuals with severe and multiple disabilities are unable to communicate well and suffer with conditions that worsen progressively throughout life. A smile may be the only window from which we can gauge success. A partnership with an institution of higher learning will enable SPARC to develop scientific and accurate measures of programmatic success.

A partnership with SPARC will significantly benefit educational institutions because SPARC will provide:

- invaluable clinical hours and coursework not otherwise available to their special education, therapeutic recreation, social work, and other health professional students,

- a coveted DEI initiative with respect to a population – young adults with severe and multiple disabilities – who is largely ignored,
- a rare interdisciplinary, collaborative, student-centered, individualized, and hands-on course of study, and
- expertise through its Clinical Advisory Board to guide and supervise their students' work at SPARC.

Because of the significant benefits flowing to the educational institution, we envision a SPARC/educational institution partnership existing by the end of the fourth quarter 2025.

“[A partnership with SPARC] will fulfill many of GMU’s goals:

- Provide workforce to sustain vital day programs and supports for adults with severe disabilities who cannot work.
- Meet DEI goals of curriculum and pedagogy and campus/community involvement.
- Offer a vital micro credential that supports interdisciplinary studies.
- Provide students with experiential learning opportunities.”

~Dr. Caroline Sutter, Co-Director Center for Health Workforce, GMU

WE ARE ON A MISSION TO SUCCEED

Government officials have suggested that we make SPARC programming virtually available to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities suffered through injury during military service and to the incapacitated adults living with our military personnel. With Senator Kaine's staff, we have discussed partnering with the Department of Defense. We are under no illusion that we will be able to accomplish such a partnership, but we will try, because our mission:

to provide adults with severe and multiple disabilities enduring learning opportunities, social connections, and a rightful and meaningful place in our community

requires us to do so.

This Blueprint for Continued Success presents a pathway by which young adults with severe and multiple disabilities can:

- Move boldly toward fulfilling their dreams.
- Live the life they have imagined.
- Realize their full potential.
- Experience their best and most meaningful lives.

No dream is too unbelievable. No aspiration is too implausible. No experience is too incredible. Our clarion call will be:

NOTHING WITHOUT US!

SPARC EXISTS BECAUSE OF OUR PARTNERS, FRIENDS, AND SUPPORTERS.

THANK YOU!

“The story of disabled success has never been a story about one solitary disabled person overcoming limitations.... We are often only as strong as our friends, and family make us, only as strong as our community, only as strong as the resources and privileges we have.”

~ Alice Wong, Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-first Century

We are proud and honored that you, our partners, friends, and supporters, have made SPARC’s young adults with severe and multiple disabilities part of your life. They are stronger, more resilient, and better able to live the life of their dreams.

THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF POSSIBILITIES.





