

## Fall 2014 Program Site Visit Reports

### Spark

#### Los Angeles Discovery Night

#### Program Overview

Spark is a national apprenticeship program that links at-risk middle school students with working professionals in areas of each student's interest, resulting in structured interactions that give the students insight and motivation on the links between school and their interests. The program dramatically reduces the risk of high school drop-out for those who participate. Focusing Philanthropy has supported and showcased Spark since 2012.

Participants are enrolled in Spark for one academic year. In addition to a special class at their school, students complete a 10-week apprenticeship in each of the two semesters, shadowing a working professional and completing a project of their own design. At the conclusion of each semester, students present their experiences in a validating, celebratory Discovery Night assembly, with the Mentors present.

Spark alumni who are old enough to have graduated from high school are doing so more than 92% of the time, compared to their peer group of whom fewer than 50% complete high school.

#### Discovery Night at Dodger Stadium

On December 9, 2014, one member of the Focusing Philanthropy team attended the Spark Los Angeles region-wide Discovery Night at Dodger Stadium. Typically, Discovery Nights are hosted at the individual partner school sites. Led by local Executive Director Yoon Choi, the Spark Los Angeles region piloted a city-wide Discovery Night, hosted at Dodger Stadium by the LA Dodgers Foundation. This was the first time a Spark region had hosted all their students and Mentors under one roof for a region-wide event. In total 261 Spark students from 7 Los Angeles middle schools and their 299 mentors from 30 companies participated in the event. Including the students, mentors, families, school leadership and other guests, about 1,000 people attended this event.

Consistent with the standard Spark program and other special events attended by Focusing Philanthropy, this larger-scale Discovery Night was well organized, student-focused, and fun.



Spark students, mentors, and families pose for celebratory photos following their project presentations. Images courtesy of Spark.



Students and their families were provided transportation to Dodger Stadium through support by the event sponsors, including the LA Dodgers Foundation. Above, a dozen school busses are parked near the Stadium Club entrance.



The event was held in the Stadium Club, an impressive event space overlooking the field.

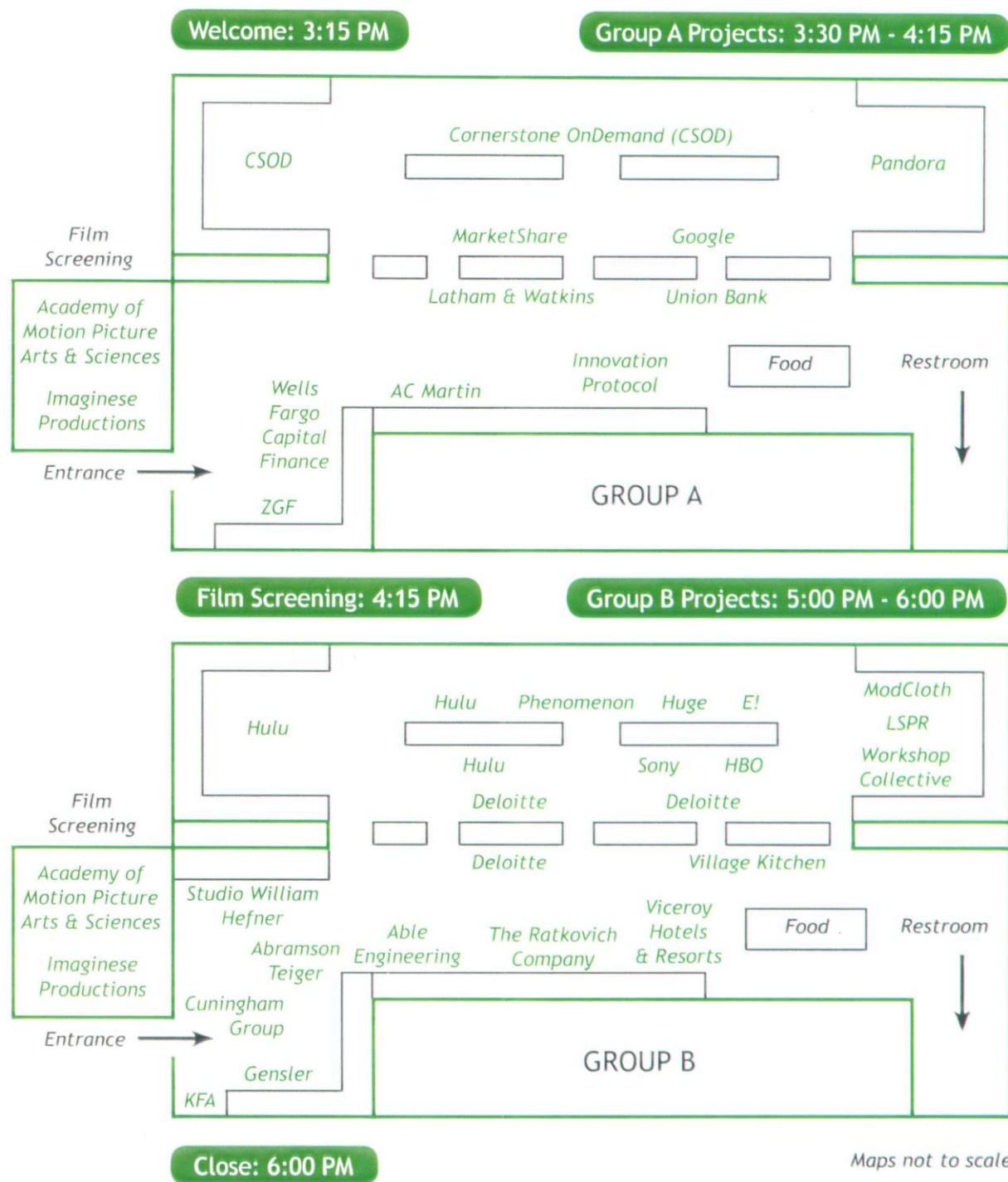




Similar to Discovery Nights held at the individual schools, the bulk of the event was dedicated to “science-fair” style project presentations. Each student and mentor pair represented their project and apprentice experience on a display board and prepared a short presentation for the families and guests who walked up and down the rows. Spark students wore brightly colored green shirts, making them easy to identify in the very full space.



Spark staff members welcomed the students, Mentors, families, and guests in both Spanish and English (above, left) and shared a highlight video from the semester (above, right).



Due to the large number of students and mentors presenting (261 students and their 299 mentors) the 7 schools were divided into two groups. Group A students, mentors, and families arrived first and presented their projects from about 3:03 – 4:15pm. They were then invited to another area of the stadium for celebratory photos with mentors and a “keep in touch” activity, before departing. Group B arrived second, started with the celebratory photos with mentors and a “keep in touch” activity, then set up their presentations display boards about 4:30pm, and presented from 5:00 - 6:00pm. The set-up for each group was organized by mentor’s host company. Dodger Dogs, popcorn, and soda were provided. The diagram above was provided in the event program.



During the transition between Group A and B, students who worked with mentors from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and Imaginese Productions presented a handful of short film projects in an adjacent room. The videos were diverse in production format and topic. Several were set at the students' schools, were cast by both students and mentors. One included special effects and ended with a spaceship landing on campus. Another was created by a student who loves basketball and his mentor, a lead producer for the classic 1986 basketball movie *Hoosiers*. The mentor helped to edit the script and find a professional voice actor to lend his talent. The student filmed and edited the entire piece on his cell phone, a method new to his mentor. The pair clearly enjoyed the process very much and had great admiration for the each other. For one particularly shy student, a mentor suggested a hand-drawn animation project. The student quickly learned that at 24 frames per second, it would take about 70 unique hand drawings to produce the 30 second video (accounting for the repetition of some frames and sequences). The final result was a funny and charming hand-drawn line animation about the struggle to wake up some mornings. The final showing was a very powerful 10 minute video, titled "Las Mismas Diferencias" or "The Same Differences," connected challenges at home to school bullying.



The screening room, outfitted for this event by the Spark corporate partner the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

Costume design was another popular project for students mentored by members of the Academy. Most of the Academy students proudly displayed photos from earlier in the semester when they got to see and hold Oscar statues.



Projects were also diverse in the main presentation hall. Business planning, especially for fashion lines (above, left) and bakeries (above, right), was a popular topic. These students did not necessarily have apprenticeships at fashion houses or restaurants, but instead used the various roles and skills of the mentors to inform their projects. For example, a mentor who works in finance for a software company helped her students to design a cupcake shop. The student wanted the business be located near a school and to offer items at prices affordable to students. As part of the business design project, her mentor helped the student to research the supply, production, labor, and other costs per cupcake to determine pricing.

Other projects were more closely tied to the mentor's own field of expertise. For example, one young man (right) was mentored by an architect. They worked together to design the student's dream home, which included an indoor gym, locker room, a designated "hang-out space," and a bowling alley on the second-floor. The display board included inspiration images, floorplans, and computer renderings of the home exterior – all of which the pair has designed during their 10 weeks together. Prompted by questions from guests, the student and mentor talked about floor materials which might prevent the sound of the second-floor bowling alley from traveling throughout the rest of the home.

### **The Growth of Spark LA**

The opportunity to see the hundreds of Spark students and mentors under one roof highlighted the impressive and very recent growth of Spark in the Los Angeles region. Spark launched its Los Angeles regional office in 2010 with 13 students at one school. Since then Spark LA has grown rapidly reaching 261 students at 7 schools this academic year. This is no small feat, especially considering the year-long, during and after school format, and the mentor recruitment needs. This large event also highlighted the outstanding organizational capacities of the Spark LA team, the clear support of Spark national's office, and the ability of Spark to partner with local small businesses, national corporations, and key local partners like the LA Dodgers Foundation to provide unique, life-changing opportunities to middle-school students.

