



A volunteer works with kids using a LEGO Mindstorms robotics kit.

# CREATIVE SPARKS

**By Jess Walter,**  
AUTHOR AND CO-FOUNDER  
OF SPARK CENTRAL

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SPARK CENTRAL  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**and Charles Apple**  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Founded by local artists, writers, educators and community leaders, Spark Central is a nonprofit creative space where youth, teens and adults can attend programs, learn skills, check out books, DVDs and equipment and learn new skills, with an emphasis on creativity. “If it’s cool and someone wants to do it,” says one of the founders, local author Jess Walter, “we try to find a way to make it happen at Spark.”

## HOW SPARK CENTRAL CAME TO BE

### FALL 2013

Jess Walter and a group of artists, writers and teachers starts INK Art Space, a creative nonprofit for kids in downtown Spokane.

### JUNE 2014

Community leaders Jim and Joe Frank of Greenstone Homes, Ben Stuckart of the Spokane City Council, Vinny Alfonso of Gonzaga University’s School of Education, and Debra Park, a Kendall Yards resident, gather to plan a “library of the future” in the West Central community. Spark Center is born.

### AUGUST 2014

The first Girls’ Rock Lab camp is offered by Liz Rognes, with help from INK Art Space program director Mischa Jakupcak.

### JANUARY 2015

INK and Spark Center begin a merger that will eventually become Spark Central, helping people of all economic backgrounds forge a path to the future they’ve imagined.

### APRIL 2015

Former INK board member and poet Brooke Matson is hired away from 826 Seattle (now The Bureau of Fearless Ideas) to return to Spokane and run the new organization’s programming.

### SUMMER 2015

Spark Central Station opens its doors on Summit Parkway and begins serving the West Central Neighborhood with programs ranging from book-making workshops to preschool puzzle rooms.



Kids learn basics of chemistry while making slime at Spark Central.

### MAY 2016

Spark hosts the first of many book projects, “I Am a Town,” with Spokane Poet Laureate Laura Read, producing a book of poems about the city, designed by Matson, with a fold-out map and illustrations by Jacquelyn Barnes.

### SUMMER 2016

Having broadened its focus to include everything from computer coding and robotics to comic books, Spark

begins offering summer camps.

### JANUARY 2017

The first-ever Spark Salon benefit features Spokane actress and comedian Julia Sweeney.

### NOVEMBER 2017

Spark Central launches its Book Publishing Field Trips, where third-graders write and publish bound books in two hours, complete with author photo and bio on the back.

### JANUARY 2018

Spark Central begins creating Creative Kits for community use, including step-by-step instructions and materials in a grab-and-use box.

### MARCH 2020

Spark Central closes due to the pandemic and moves much of its programming online. Donor-supported Creative Care Packages are sent to West Central youth in the spring, followed by online summer camps.

### SEPTEMBER 2020

In response to the pandemic forcing schools to go online, Spark Central creates Level Up After-School, a mentoring program to build students’ resiliency and creativity, in partnership with Spokane Public Schools for Holmes Elementary and Audubon Elementary.

### DECEMBER 2021

Spark Central wins a major state education grant supporting Level Up’s continuation in Spokane Public Schools.

### APRIL 15 2022

Spark’s 6th Annual Spark Salon: Amplify Us is set for April 15th, 2022 at the Knitting Factory to highlight our music programming.

Participants can attend in person or online. Learn more at [Spark-Central.org](http://Spark-Central.org).

## THE WORK SPARK CENTRAL DOES

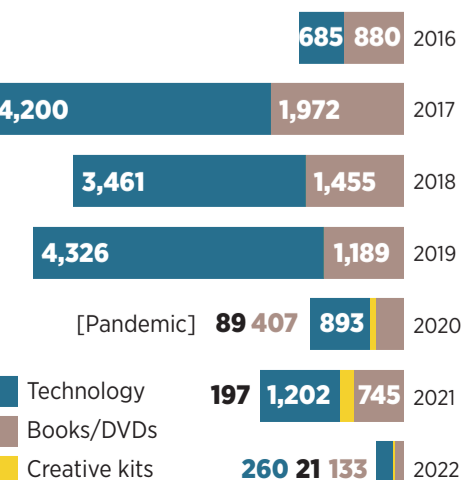
Like nearly everyone else, Spark Central was affected by lockdowns and reduced traffic during the pandemic.

- Outreach events
- Drop-in programs
- Community events
- Youth, teen and parent-child events
- Adult workshops

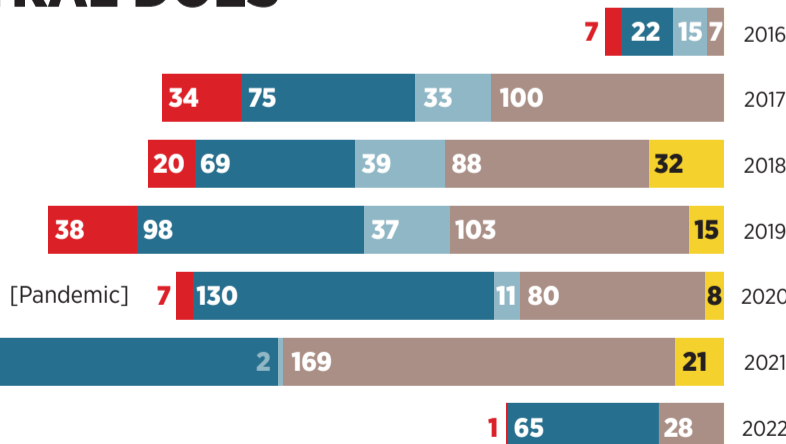
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### MATERIALS CHECKED OUT

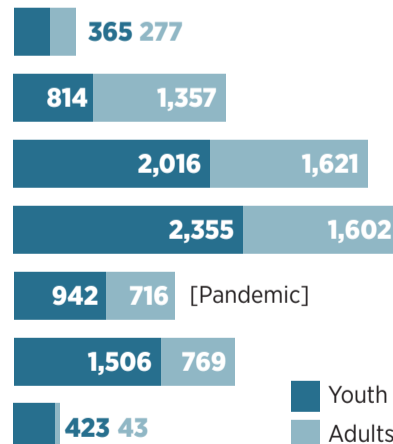
Creative kits became available in 2018 but Spark Central didn’t keep track of checkouts until 2020.



### PROGRAMS OFFERED

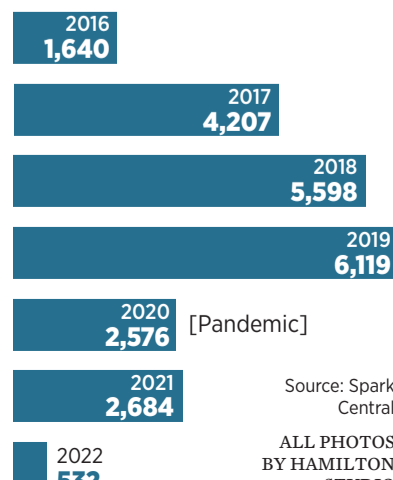


### PROGRAM ATTENDEES



### VOLUNTEER HOURS

Including program leaders, station staffers, development leaders and administration volunteers.



Source: Spark Central  
ALL PHOTOS BY HAMILTON STUDIO