

SPARK Center



The SPARK (Supporting Parents & Resilient Kids) Center in Mattapan provides care for some of the most vulnerable children in Massachusetts. A program of Boston Medical Center, the SPARK Center offers comprehensive, integrated, state-of-the-art services for children and families whose lives are affected by medical, emotional and behavioral challenges. The center became involved with CIF when they began planning a new addition to their facility. SPARK Center leaders attended CIF’s weeklong training, Building Stronger Centers. “Having a full week of training was an incredible gift,” said Dr. Martha Vibbert, the SPARK Center’s executive director, who attended the training on behalf of the organization. “It was one of the best spent weeks of my professional life. It was so empowering and encouraging to have the opportunity to share ideas.”

With CIF’s guidance, the SPARK Center added 2,500 square feet to their existing facility, which they needed to accommodate their expanding program. The new, versatile, flexible space allows for professional development and parental engagement. After the successful completion of that project, center leadership began focusing on the creation of a new outdoor classroom adjacent to their facility. With CIF’s help, the SPARK Center had access to top-notch consultants, who worked with the center to build a playground that has quickly become an important part of the center’s curriculum and therapeutic practice.

According to Vibbert, the natural play space has not only helped the children in her care develop essential gross motor skills but has also become increasingly valuable in their mental health interventions. Kids who otherwise have trouble in competitive play spaces can find their own level at the SPARK Center’s playground. For kids who have experienced real trauma, this space represents a place of safety. Vibbert believes that the nature-based outdoor area is emblematic of a new wave of early childhood care, one in which the silos between programs are broken down.

“There’s no way to describe what the natural playground means to the children, parents, and staff,” said Vibbert. “CIF encouraged us to use the kind of thinking that is involved in implementing the medical homes model of integrated care. We now have the opportunity to think about something bigger than child care.”

# Children Served	61
# Slots Improved	57
# Slots Added	?
# Employees	28
Total Project Cost	\$183,500
Size of Program Space	20,000 square ft.
Time to Complete	2.5 years
Sources of Funds	Children’s Investment Fund Foundations Philanthropic Sources

For more information about the SPARK Center, visit their website:
www.bmc.org/pediatrics-sparkcenter.htm.