In 1951, a group of twelve parents of children with developmental disabilities met for the first time at a coffee shop in Springfield to discuss what more could be done to help their developmentally disabled children lead better lives. At that time, children with developmental disabilities were asked not to come to school, were thought to be unable to learn, and drew unwelcome stares and comments in public.

The original twelve parents were soon joined by other parents and by civic groups who had heard about the new parents’ group. The Junior League of Springfield, The United Commercial Travelers (UCT), United Way and other civic groups began helping as volunteers with fundraising and other activities. Over the following decades, the parents went from meeting in church basements, to “The Little Red School House,” to SPARC. The agency serves more than 900 individuals with mental disabilities, epilepsy, autism, cerebral palsy, and other developmental disabilities.

On August 11, 2004, SPARC held a celebration to honor these Founding Parents. During the reception, SPARC’s Endowment Fund, Inc. also announced the establishment of the SPARC Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation. This fund gives donors another charitable option to contribute to SPARC. It will also complement the organization’s own Planned Giving program by increasing awareness of its need for endowment gifts, making it easier for people to make a gift to SPARC.