The Clubhouse Network
WHERE TECHNOLOGY MEETS IMAGINATION

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF THE TWIN CITIES

IMPACT STORY: Minneapolis, MN USA

8 Clubhouses Collaborate on Youth Gaming Tournament

HOW IT GOT STARTED

At the Jerry Gamble Boys & Girls Club in Minneapolis, coordinator David Le has launched a popular eSports learning opportunity for his youth members. And by reaching out to invite other clubhouses to collaborate, he's strengthening and expanding relationships across the region.

Clubhouse leaders already knew that the world of digital gaming was incredibly popular with their young people. It has come a long way from its play-focused, isolating origins decades ago to the global online competitions of today.

Inspired by the Clubhouse Network Learning Model, which advocates for hands-on collaboration, site coordinators shared many conversations about how to design their tournament and create its supportive structure. One of their goals was to lift up their youth members from merely consuming game technology to building skills and confidence that could lead to future job roles in online gaming. Youth members were quickly intrigued.

THE TECHNOLOGY

It's not difficult or expensive to host a gaming tournament. The setup is fairly easy, and costs are minimal. Even with little to no budget, cell phones are able to do much of this.

Youth members who are not competing are able to support and connect with other youths during the tournament. They can use the technology around them to create wonderful memories and document the tournament. This way, they are able to build skills in diverse supportive eSports technologies:

- In-person event planning and tracking tools
- Social media outreach and other promotional tools
- Microphones and speakers to welcome spectators and manage each phase of it
- Tech support to help set up each competitor
- Official launch/monitoring of the online tournament
- Recording equipment to capture in-person/online
- Digital videography and photography
- A photo booth to create fun and encourage social posts by youth members

SMASH BROS TOURNAMENT SPOTLIGHT

Tournament host site: Jerry Gamble Boys & Girls Club of the Twin Cities. Participating sites: Capri Theater, Hope Community, Summit Academy, Hennepin County Central Library, MIGIZI, Brian Coyle Center, and Richfield Middle School Boys & Girls Club.

"Our youth were already playing Smash Bros. Some had invested a lot of time, and others were just dabbling in this particular game. When they heard we may be able to offer it as a youth tournament, they were eager to learn more." *-JT Evans, Hope Community coordinator*

© 2024 The Clubhouse Network. All Rights Reserved. www.TheClubhouseNetwork.org

After the tournament was over, Angel Sandro, coordinator from Hope Community, provided their podcast equipment to help youth members interview the champion and 3 other competitors. The goal was to expand their community of interest, and boost signups for the next tournament. Here are just a few comments from the podcast:

- I was invited to compete by David and Jimmy.
- I started practicing 2 hours/day.
- I chose the Pokemon character because of its skills.
- My favorite stages: the Pokemon stadium and Smashville.
- I'm learning that theme song on the piano.
- If I could add new characters, I'd add Battle Cats.
- My perfect gaming room would have 2 or more monitors, game chairs, a couch, and LED lights.

Check out the Podcast here on Spotify (14:38).

GAMING EVOLUTION

Youth interest in gaming saw a rise during Covid, when so many were stuck at home and eager for connections with others. Building experience observing and participating in gaming (as individuals and on teams) can be viewed as preparing for future career options. At a recent Clubhouse Network Annual Conference in Boston, site leaders brainstormed ways to put gaming into the Clubhouse learning model and expand it across 150+ sites around the world. And not just for building tech skills – all sorts of creative intersections are possible, including animation, coding, and testing the games.

Clubhouse youth members can now prepare and apply for eSports college scholarships from international gaming organizations. Add sports management, team coaching, and even entrepreneurship careers to the gaming field.

THE VIBE

"This event really was exciting in person," said David Le, "because it showed the value of face-to-face connections and community building for clubhouses. We hope to inspire more youth to participate, and inspire other clubhouses to host the same kind of event for their youth."

"The excitement was contagious. It was a really cool to see these young people (and coordinators) from different centers hang out, talk, and share their enthusiasm for gaming with like-minded peers – everyone was having fun," commented Mischa Kegan, Clubhouse Network liaison for the Midwest region.

continued from page 1

STEM INSPIRATION

Youth members are encouraged to invite their friends to tournaments. "And from there, these young people can jump from participating in a tournament to other STEM options they discover at the clubhouse. For many of them, this might be the first time they can think about careers in something they actually like to do," said JT Evans, coordinator at Hope Community.

© 2024 The Clubhouse Network. All Rights Reserved. www.TheClubhouseNetwork.org

"I always wanted to do something collaboratively at clubhouses across the Twin Cities. I wanted to explore a new area of learning and inspiration – what's a new, fun, cheap, easy activity for everyone to do together. I wanted to make it available to see who would want to join in. The level of participation is what made it a success. And now our youth can see and start thinking about gaming daily," said David.

"I also want to mention that our CBO director (who leads our Community-Based Organization site) played a big role in advocating for us to get this project off the ground. A year ago, I mentioned to her that a game called League of Legends hosts international competitions with a prize pool of $23 million, and is one of the best global eSports games. That made a difference, so I encourage other sites to reach out in a similar way. A CBO leader can help build connections, and enhance the budget for equipment and marketing, if needed."

Mischa added, "When something is brought into the clubhouse and offered to youth members, it has weight in a way that tells them their interest is valid, not just for a hobby, but also for jobs and a career. The proof is in the pudding – it shows our young people and our organizational management that there is a lot of interest and important pathways here."

"What is eSports really? An organized video competition played in a professional place for prizes by individuals or teams. What we've done here fits that definition, so our tournaments fall under the eSports umbrella," JT said.

"eSports is literally everywhere now," mused David. "Think of the hundreds of thousands of viewers watching tournaments on YouTube. They see youth teams competing for glory, and making money, and they learn about all the supportive technology services – real people working in branded merchandising and advertising – journaling and podcasting – all just for the gaming industry."

JT added, "Our efforts open the doors to more ops for our members. They were already gaming in the clubhouse, of course, but we offered it mostly for unstructured chill time. Our young people grew eager for a tournament, and were inspired to think more about it to add their ideas to our plans."

Finally, from David, "In-person benefits were part of our initial plan. We knew it could all be done digitally, but having our first tournament in-person ensured a community feel that is really important to us, where youth and leaders discover a huge amount of common ground in this activity they love. This is what we really wanted to build upon!"

continued from page 2

For more information about the Jerry Gamble Boys & Girls Club, visit https://boysandgirls.org/ttc-gamble/ and https://theclubhousenetwork.org/locations/jerrygamble/

© 2024 The Clubhouse Network. All Rights Reserved. www.TheClubhouseNetwork.org