



SPP

Boosting youth engagement

with esports and organised gaming

David Mackay, Kade Brown and Matt Henwood, **March 2020**



Boosting youth engagement has huge benefits in society.



When young people are disengaged, the impact at an individual, community and economic level is far reaching.

Transitioning industries, the rise of competing options in education and entertainment, and the prevalence of reality and social media have changed the landscape for Australian youths to be meaningfully engaged in their communities. This engagement is essential in order to develop the social and emotional competencies that allow them to flourish throughout life.

Engagement happens when young people have active connections to the communities and places around them, as well as to their own interests (Fletcher, 'A Short Introduction to Youth Engagement', 2013).

When young people are not engaged a range of negative social indicators can manifest, including low participation in work or study, high incidence of offending including family violence and property offences, and higher emotional maturity vulnerability (Australian Early Development Census, 2018).

Challenges

Faced by the research group



Safety

Sometimes I need a place to hang out that isn't home.

Variety

I don't feel like any of the activities on offer around the local area suit my interests.

Sense of Belonging

Sometimes I struggle to connect and communicate with people my own age.

Role Models

I don't really have anyone to look up to who shares the same interests as me.

Attainment

I struggle to stick with activities long enough to get really good at them.



In order to stimulate meaningful engagement, young people need a range of needs met.

SPP recently conducted primary research with school-aged youths within a specific metropolitan community. We were able to synthesise a range of key themes that young people reported as barriers to feeling engaged with the communities around them (Exhibit 1).

These themes associated with engagement included, but were not limited to, the research groups' considerations and sentiments around **safety, variety, a sense of belonging, having access to role models, and attainment.**



Sports have long been used as a youth engagement tool – esports is the newest player in this mix.



Video games are now firmly entrenched in mainstream society, with two thirds of Australians playing video games¹.

Sport, for many positive reasons, is often used as a vehicle for engaging young people, from grassroots to elite level participation. In recent years, the esports global phenomenon has expanded to a point where engagement opportunities exist right from casual play through to elite or professional play.

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Esports, short for 'electronic sports', is a form of competitive gaming where individual players and, more increasingly, teams compete against each other across a range of multiplayer video games. Globally, it is estimated that there are more than 200 million esports enthusiasts. Within Australia, the estimates range from 300,000 to 1.5 million. As its popularity grows, esports has increasingly adopted organised forms of domestic and international leagues and tournaments.

¹ IGEA DA20 <https://igea.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/DA20-Report-FINAL-Aug19.pdf>

Gaming and esports can be used to directly address youth engagement challenges.

Available research suggests gaming and esports can deliver cognitive, creative, motivational, emotional and social benefits. Organised gaming and esports facilities can also address many of the youth challenges SPP identified through our primary research and insights, including:

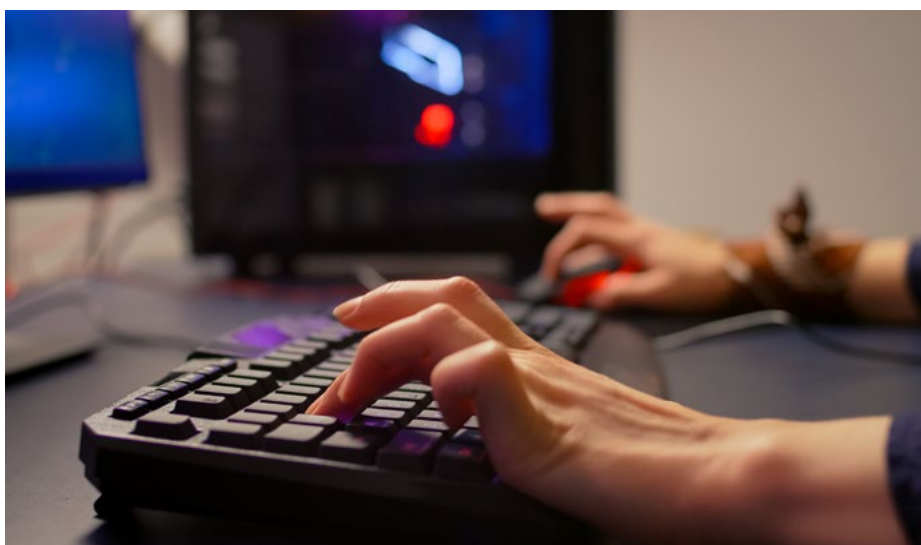
- A place to be physically and emotionally safe for those lacking a secure home environment.
- An offering for those who struggle to engage with traditional sports.
- An environment to develop social confidence and competencies.
- A mechanism to engage with mentors and role models, when equipped with the right mix of staff and linked to appropriate adjacent services.
- A model for achieving growth and development in technical skills, and a sense of achievement that comes with that growth.

Departments of education, alongside private sector providers, have found opportunities to positively engage school students in competitive leagues, whilst also linking in to school STEM curricula. NGOs and game publishers also see the engagement potential of esports and have developed materials and modules to encourage healthy gaming habits.



In order to be successful, a youth esports facility needs support processes and services.

When designing a youth engagement program based around esports, organisers should consider the activities and resources required to ensure initial and sustained success.



SPP recommends the considerations include:

▶ **Appropriate supervision and mentoring**

A team of adult personnel with specific capabilities in youth engagement as well as technical expertise to facilitate gaming.

▶ **Adjacent support services**

The program should interface closely with relevant government and NGO support services, particularly when those services interact with the same youth cohorts as the esports facility.

▶ **Skill development programs**

Structured modules in specific gaming skills as well as related topics such as coding, game design, virtual reality and shoutcasting should be part of the mix. Intensive school holiday programs may also be considered to allow the depth of skill development required to meet youth engagement objectives.

▶ **Holistic wellbeing focus**

Core facilitated gaming activities should encompass built-in concepts such as healthy game play habits, positive team-based interactions, and physical activities that supplement more static game play.

SPP has supported government, university and private sector clients to understand the opportunities around esports as a youth engagement tool.

With established consulting practices in Government, Education, and Sports and Entertainment sectors, SPP has leveraged our deep project experience and subject matter expertise to support clients as they seek to define a way forward that incorporates esports as part of their youth engagement mix.



Please contact us to discuss the insights in this article in more detail. [▶](#)

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Ben Apted spearheads our Education and Research practice, which is recognised as one of the leading Education consulting practices in Australia, serving University, Vocational, Schools and Government Education Department clients. Ben is a recognised industry and innovation precinct expert having acted as Senior Advisor to State Economic Development, Federal industry, and international precincts.

About SPP

Strategic Project Partners is a generalist, strategy consulting firm. We support organisations to solve complex strategic and operational challenges.

Established in 2005, SPP has delivered successful outcomes for a broad range of commercial and Government sector clients.

SPP's Consumer practice brings customer first capabilities to helping our clients profitably grow.

We serve retailers and branded goods, leisure, sport and media clients.

Our services cover:

- Market opportunity identification and assessment

- Brand portfolio and channel strategy optimisation
- Pricing strategy for profitable growth
- Mobilising go to market sales and promotional investment
- Data and analytics strategy and activation



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