



# Virtual Games Vitalize Community Health and Wellness

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## Introduction

Over three billion people connect online creating vast, virtual communities that extend beyond traditional boundaries. Our generation is the first to explore and experience these new interactive media frontiers. We expect explorers to mark their path as they navigate unfamiliar terrain, making it safer for those who follow.

Yet, we know very little about what creates responsible virtual communities or how to build them. Our opportunity is to create the “trail guides” to healthy digital interactions. Virtual platforms that foster safe and responsible use create an ideal environment to teach and reinforce valuable life skills.

## Background

Multiple organizations have investigated online communities and the health and wellness benefits of virtual communities.

The Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) focuses on children's health and wellness interacting with media. Their peer reviewed research documents virtual games' potential to improve health and safety.

One CMCH study measured outcomes to online game-based education. It found that virtual games can teach children to be safe and responsible both on and offline.<sup>1</sup> CMCH also identified problematic online behaviors that may disrupt people's lives.<sup>2</sup>

Studies conducted by Professor Donna Cross in Australia<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> measure social media and online behaviors' impact on children and adolescents on and offline.

Additionally, the paper "Trail Guides to Trading Posts on the Journey to Health"<sup>7</sup> shows that virtual communities offer new ways to address health and wellness. Unfortunately, we don't yet know how.

We need answers to important questions. For example, how do we go beyond reducing risks and negative responses? How do we foster healthy practices? How do we leverage virtual communities to improve offline communities? We want to know what features support and reinforce responsible behavior. It takes quality research to mark trails that improve online platforms' ability to foster thriving communities.

The answers will create guideposts capable of enhancing the experience of billions of individuals already connecting online. Informed virtual platforms can include features and social supports that reinforce responsible behavior, teach life lessons, and improve job skills.

## Our Opportunity

As the first generation to explore virtual frontiers, we can guide those who follow. Leading academic institutions, industry leaders, and trusted nonprofits are collaborating. They are testing, identifying, and sharing effective tools to prevent and intervene against cyber risks. They are also sharing supports that foster personal growth and community improvements.

For example, Riot Games connects over 100 million players. In an effort to reduce negative online behaviors, Riot created the Honor Initiative.<sup>8</sup> It goes beyond preventing risks. It provides positive rewards, virtual kudos, for responsible behavior. To scale and expand the impact, Riot Games broadened the initiative offline to schools in Australia.

Another example is the National Teacher Platform (NTP). The NTP is sponsored by India's Ministry of Human Resource Development, and the NTP tool Teacher APP is created by Guru-G. The platform connects teachers to resources, and connects them virtually to each other.<sup>9</sup> India has more than 10 million teachers. Improving their skills is the fastest way to improve students' academic outcomes. The platform connects and supports the teachers with a shared infrastructure. This infrastructure bridges online communities by supporting and improving the teachers working with students face-to-face. NTP helps teachers shine and succeed. It enables all teachers to create, curate and localize quality content.

EP3 Foundation convenes the stakeholders needed to identify the credible guides who mark how to foster thriving virtual communities. By working together, individuals and organizations increase their capacity to collaborate and solve local and global challenges.

## Partners

**Riot Games** has over 100 million players who on average put in more than 1 billion hours monthly worldwide.<sup>10</sup> Ivan Davies and a research team at Riot Games want to explore how to use the game format for learning and fostering a healthy balance both on- and offline. They are keen to create online living, learning communities that improve and connect offline communities.

**EP3 Foundation** is the trusted, neutral nonprofit creating safe and healthy digital environments that protects and provides privacy, safety, and security.

**Mei Lin Fung** is the co-founder of the People-Centered Internet and the Unit Coordinator for California Health Medical Reserve Corp (CH-MRC), the nonprofit medical reserve corps driving EP3 Health Data initiatives. A member of the World Economic Forum's Core Team for Digital Economics and the Global Future Council for Digital Economy and Society, she serves as Vice Chair for Internet Inclusion for the IEEE. She is an evangelist for living, learning communities as the basis of thriving networks of sustainable, inclusive and trustworthy digital economies.

**The Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH), Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard School of Medicine, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, and the Clinic for Interactive Media & Internet Disorders (CIMAID):** CMCH builds on foundational, peer reviewed research conducted with Hancock in 2010. They previously documented virtual game communities' potential to teach important skills and competencies. This study found that health and safety skills applied both on and offline. CIMAID is associated with the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH), Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard School of Medicine, and Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.

**Donna Cross** is the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences Fellow. Professor Donna Cross conducts school and family-based health research. Her intervention research bridges on and offline experiences and behaviors. Her focus is improving the health and wellness of children to young adults. Professor Cross is a professor at the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Western Australia, part of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, a Vice Chancellor's Adjunct Professor at Edith Cowan University, and an Adjunct Professor at Curtin University.

**Daniel Kardefelt-Winther** is a researcher contracted by UNESCO to study children online in Europe.

**Jack Lewin** is the Chair, National Coalition on Health Care

**Joy Pritts** is the former Chief Privacy Officer for HHS.U.S. Privacy Compliance.

**Robyn, Treyvaud, Wrangle**, Digital health and wellness start up in Australia (TBD)

**Stanford School of Medicine**, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

**Lan Jenson**, is the founder and CEO of the nonprofit transparency and accountability organization, Adaptable Security

**Prof. Dr. Edson Prestes**, Head,  $\phi$ -Robotics Research Group, Informatics Institute , Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

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