

Libraries, Videogames, and Civic Engagement

One of our teen patrons who recently moved to our small town came to tell me that one of the video games we purchased for the programs was not compatible with the system we purchased. He asked to ride with me when I took it back and helped me pick out another game to take its place. He asked me if I owned the library. I replied that I was the director but that I didn't own the library, I only managed it. He asked me who did own it and I replied, "Well, you do." I explained that public libraries were owned by the citizens that used them and/or lived in the community, and that their taxes went to pay for the services. He thought about it for a minute and said "That's really cool! I guess I'll have to hang out here more since it's mine." It made my day.

—Beth Wheeler Dean, Guntersville (AL) Public Library¹

Abstract

Libraries can provide scaffolding experiences around gaming that improve teens' civic discourse and behavior to a level not experienced elsewhere in the community. Gaming tournaments model positive competition and connect teens as a community and to the larger community. This chapter of "Gaming in Libraries: Learning Lessons from the Intersections" explores specific examples where libraries have implemented gaming programs and events that have clearly led to these positive results in their communities.

The Pew/MacArthur study found that playing videogames together can offer opportunities for positive civic experiences for youth and can foster connections to the community. It encourages appropriate groups to begin researching and structuring those experiences in order to maintain democratic participation in the larger local, national, and global communities. This is certainly a worthy goal to explore further, but merely offering public spaces where diverse groups of people can play together is a relatively easy step that many libraries have already taken, even small ones with very few resources.

Providing opportunities for youth to play videogames together in a safe, noncommercialized space gives kids a place outside of school where they can come together, meet new people, and learn to resolve their differences without resorting to violence or requiring adult intervention. Anecdotal evidence consistently suggests that when librarians provide a simple framework of rules, the kids learn to work through problems among themselves, a skill many would say is not practiced nearly enough in the twenty-first century.

Libraries have always held a unique role in transforming people's lives, and as a result, many adults have fond memories of the libraries of their childhood. These warm, fuzzy feelings about libraries were actually quantified in *From Awareness to Funding: A Study of Library Support in America*, a 2008 publication by OCLC.² Thanks to a grant from the Gates Foundation, OCLC was able to partner with Leo Burnett to survey American voters about their attitudes and support for funding public libraries. The results were astonishing and counter to what most of us believe to be true.

The focus groups interviewed for this report center their passion for the library on its transformative power to make them better human beings. The catalyst that energizes these adults to actually vote in favor of financial support for libraries is not library use, something most of us have always believed drives support, but rather the library's ability to help people achieve their potential. That transformational power—not books—is our brand, and those transformations happen in relation to many different media. They happen in relation to people, communal spaces, social programs, a wide variety of services, and many different content containers, including but not limited to books.

The transformations that occur when libraries bring people together around content cannot be dictated, forced, or structured. And yet, many libraries are now using videogames as an infrastructure to provide transformational experiences for traditional nonusers in order to connect with them on a personal level. When this happens, these connections become just as powerful as the ones today's adults experienced in their youth, and they give these teens that same sense of engagement with their libraries. Indeed, the library itself is transformed, and it can fulfill even more of its mission for the whole community, not just traditional patrons.

Case Study 1

by Kieran Hixon

It all started with a blog post from The Shifted Librarian. I read it, rolled my chair back, looked in the director's office, and said, "Boss, can I hold a gaming tournament?" She said I could go ahead, but that there wasn't any money in the budget for it. One month later, I held my first tournament. I borrowed everything. I believed that if we could just pull it off once, success would follow. Initially, we borrowed equipment from community members. We spoke with kids and parents who gladly donated videogame systems, games, controllers, and a television. Thirty kids showed up for the first gaming event, one of our best turnouts for a program back in 2007. When we saw that the kids were excited and eager to participate, that's when we really got serious.

The John C. Fremont Library District is a small, rural public library in Florence, Colorado. Our service district is about 5,000 people. We have a 4,000-square-foot building with a little corner in the back that we carved out for gaming. There is one television, an Xbox, a GameCube, and a PlayStation 2. We bust out the Wii for tournaments, and occasionally for free play. There isn't a videogame rental store in our area; actually there isn't even a movie rental store in our town, so we decided to circulate the games. At this point, we have about 180 titles for PS2, PS3, PSP, Xbox, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo DS, and GameCube. Currently, the videogame collection is the second-highest circulating collection in the library. We see the videogame collection in the same way we see any of our other circulation materials. The assistant director and I plan to run videogaming tournaments at the library every other month, and *Yu-gi-oh!* or other card-style game tournaments every three months or so. We have also partnered with the school and others in our area to unleash gaming on the world (or at least our county).

Things are really changing in our library, and gaming is a part of it. A long time ago (around 2002), in a galaxy far, far away (almost four blocks), our library was... ummm... under other management and in a different building. In that era (and we shall call it the Dark Times), only two kids were allowed in the library at a time, and there was only one shelf of Young Adult books. (I could go on, but you get the idea. It was the last place teens wanted to be.) Well, change happens, and it was time for the library to forge a new relationship with the community. After the success of the first tournament, we thought that with a gaming program, we could reinvigorate—no, invigorate—the youth of our community and create a welcoming place for them in our library as well as an appealing reason to come in the door. Specific statistics of improved usage are hard for us to show because so much has changed in our library; however, I can safely say that the young folks in our town love it here.

Although the tournaments are open to all ages, we generally get teenagers (and usually the ones that might never come to the library otherwise). Families come in to watch the competition and often find something in the library that interests them. In order to compete in the tournament, you have to be a library card holder with no fines. It was amazing how many cards we issued and how many fines were paid two hours before the tournament! Currently, more than 60 percent of the people in our district have library cards.

For tournaments, we usually have two or three gaming stations—one big one on the projector and one or two on televisions. Normally, the library closes on Saturday at 2:00 p.m., so we schedule gaming tournaments for 2:30 p.m. Though we generally try to sign up contestants the week before the tournament, a handful of folks inevitably need to sign up at the door. Once all the cards have been checked for fines, we start the tournament. We use a simple bracket system to record who will play whom. Participants are allowed to sign up for any or all of the games offered, but if a contestant is playing one game when her name is called for another, it's up to the player to decide which she will forfeit. There is always food available. Most of the time, the players have an audience, but there's plenty of milling around too. In other words, they come, they play, they make a mess, they leave happy—and sometimes their picture is in the newspaper as the tournament winner!

Near the end of our first tournament, the assistant director and I were talking to each other about the fantastic turnout. She said, "We'll have to do this again someday." A kid overheard her but misunderstood and thought she had said, "We'll have to do this again Sunday." He shouted out to the entire room: "We can do it again! Tomorrow!" That much enthusiasm for a Saturday afternoon spent at the library is something that makes our hearts swell.

Holding these tournaments and making games available for checkout draws in patrons who might not ever think to set foot in a library. More than that, they even seem to get excited about being here and feel comfortable coming back to the library—heck, some of them have even been known to check out a book! Kids come to the library and ask when the next tournament will be and what games will be featured. Other organizations call us for help with videogame tournaments. We've held tournaments for the middle school and high school as an incentive for academic achievement. We have good turnouts for the tournaments, and the community keeps asking for more, so we call that success!

Our original expectation was to simply create interest in the library. As that succeeded, our expectations grew. Gaming is now more than just a marketing tool. We use videogaming to supplement our other library activities. The library has a reputation in our town of not being a

“quiet library.” Most folks follow that up by saying something to the effect that they are glad and it gives the kids something to do around here. The funny thing is that the adult knitter’s group is MUCH louder than the kids playing videogames! But it’s true that we aren’t shhh-ers, except with the videogame area. When I first put the box of videogame stuff in the corner and put up a sign saying “Feel free to play,” there was a fear that the game area would be loud. We really kept tight reins on it, and the kids respected that. I told some of the kids point blank that if it was noisy, the “powers that be” would make me take the games away. In the two years the games have been available, we have unplugged the TV twice.

Two years into this, we now have a budget for the acquisition of videogames and for the tournaments. I used our first budget of \$500 to purchase a Wii and Wii games. We have gone from spending nothing on gaming to having an overall budget of \$2,500 for the year (which is about half of what we spend on DVDs for the year and about 10 percent of the overall materials budget). In our gaming area, the PS2, the GameCube, and the TV were donated by community members. The used XBox was \$25. I started with ten games that could be played on the equipment we had. I purchased those games used, using money made by selling a donation of a Sega Genesis and seventy game cartridges on eBay. We also let folks pay off late fees and fines by donating videogames (if the videogames were ones we were interested in and the person doing billing said OK).

Our next step is addressing the curiosity factor we have encountered with educators, parents, and community members. We partnered with the remedial reading teacher at the high school and had a videogame day for her classes that exceeded her expectations. Most of those kids aren’t big library users. Having games sponsored by the library and telling them that the library has games

for checkout got them interested in the library and got them into the library later that week. It also sparked a lot of curiosity from other teachers. Taking our programming out of the library’s walls and into the community helps the library as an institution become more accessible and more useful to the community as a whole. Now we are talking about collaborating with other teachers and groups for other events.

As we run more and more gaming events, we have also picked up a few tricks. Flexibility is a big one . . . as is synchronizing the guitars. The first time we had both *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* as tournaments, it appeared that something was off as far as the controllers went. Kids were not being able to score as well as they thought they could and felt that the controllers were sluggish. We realized that when we moved the games’ display from the TV to the projector, we needed to synchronize the system. The options menu led us through the process—a minor issue, but an important one. We let the kids who had already gone have re-dos, and it all worked out. The point is that stuff comes up. We learn a lot on the fly. None of us on staff are expert gamers by a long shot, but the same sort of librarian skills that can do reader’s advisory can also synthesize and carry out what needs to be done for videogames.

The main thing we have done to make videogaming in our library a very successful endeavor is this: we made an effort. We saw a need and we strove to fulfill it, just like any other library program. We have only one real policy (and it isn’t even written down): no Mature-rated games are allowed. Other than that, we put our best foot forward, and see where it leads—it might lead to success!

On November 15, 2008, the American Library Association coordinated its first ever National Gaming Day @ Your Library, an event in which more than 600 libraries from across the country participated. More than 14,000 people played games, and 597 libraries filled out a survey to report about their patrons’ experiences. Without any planning for civic engagement and without any deliberate infrastructure put in place to foster civic outcomes, the sheer number of anecdotal comments that supported the claims of the Pew/MacArthur and CERG papers was completely unexpected. Here is just a small sampling:

- “While the boys played on the Wii, a young girl sat down with another child’s parent and together they played ‘Pictureka!’ for an hour. These two would probably never have met if it hadn’t been for National Gaming Day!” (from Bel Air Library, Harford County, Maryland)
- “A young man with Asperger’s (a form of high-functioning autism) made several new friends and was enthralled by the ‘Dungeons & Dragons’ starter



Figure 2
Teen Halloween Party (2008) with videogames at the John C. Fremont Public Library.

- game. He comes to the library often and has made arrangements to meet up with several of the other young men to play the game again. One of our older teens volunteered to help organize a regular game schedule for both the ‘Dungeons & Dragons’ and ‘Magic: the Gathering.’ This particular young man has been an excellent mentor to the younger teens. They even talked about getting a league going for ‘Magic: the Gathering.’” (Bon Air Regional Library, Kentucky)
- “I invited my teen library volunteers to sit at the four ‘gaming’ tables and be available for playing board games if the parents wanted to look for books. I have the best picture of two of our male teens playing ‘CandyLand’ with four little girls!” (Duncan Public Library, Oklahoma)
 - “I also had some younger children playing ‘Mario Kart’ with some experienced players. The younger children could have easily had their spirits crushed by these more experienced players. Instead the experienced players were sharing tips and suggestions as they played the game. All of the players also very easily gave up their controls so other players could have a turn.” (Hockessin Public Library, Delaware)
 - “One of our patrons (a crotchity old man if ever there was one) would play chess on the computer if we would let him. When he got bumped off, he came downstairs to our National Gaming Day room and played ‘Pictureka!’ for 3 hours straight—with patrons of all ages!” (McDowell County Public Library, North Carolina)
 - “We had a 6-year old come in with a mohawk hairdo ready to rock the library on ‘Rock Band.’ He was ready to take on the high schoolers.” (Norelius Community Library, Iowa)
 - “The ‘Magic: the Gathering’ cards were a tremendous hit at our library. There are a group of kids in our small town who tend to be unsupervised and are seen often ‘hanging out’ downtown. They came into the library, saw the brand new ‘Magic’ sets and it was like Christmas to them. They offered to open the sets, sort them into decks and get the game organized. They then stayed for hours playing and invited other friends to come join them. It was so nice to see these kids off the streets enjoying our library, and they were so surprised to hear that the cards would be available to them anytime the library is open. I’m sure we will see a lot of them in the near future.” (Rebecca M. Arthurs Memorial Library, Pennsylvania)
 - “To win the door prizes, everyone was given tickets to enter into the various drawings. The kids got one ticket for coming in, one ticket for playing their first game, and an additional ticket for each person to whom they taught a game. This caused many of the kids to go out of their way to introduce new games to kids. Many even really enjoyed teaching.” (Tri-Community Library, Idaho)
 - “At the end time, I had to ask a group of teenagers to leave. They responded quickly and started moving toward the door and then one of them said, ‘Do you want some help with these chairs?’ At the time, I was too tired to turn down help and enthusiastically said, ‘YES!’ They helped me put the room back in order very quickly, moving a dozen tables and about 50 chairs. But my favorite part of the day had to be hearing the teens cheer for each other during the Brawl contests and clap at the end of the battles. They all got along so well even though we had quite a range of ‘teenagers’—18 to 8!” (Pickaway County District Public Library, Ohio)
 - “At the end of the Brawl tournament the losing teen turned to the winner and said—‘that was a great game. Congratulations.’ He was a really good sport!” (Port Orange Regional Library, Florida)
- These types of experiences happened on just one day when a fraction of libraries in the United States simultaneously offered gaming. Imagine what could happen if libraries created sustained programs that built on these types of civic opportunities and proactively cultivated these types of interactions. Could libraries scaffold activities around game play that would actually engage teens to become more involved in their communities? The Ann Arbor District Library has proven that the answer to that question is a resounding yes.

Case Study 2

by Eli Neiburger

The Great Unmeasurables: What AADL has Learned from Five Years of Gaming

Our first gaming event at Ann Arbor District Library was in August 2004; it was a *Mario Kart* tournament for teens, and about thirty-five kids showed up. It was the first round of our first championship season. Now, with over two hundred events under our belts and having reached over a thousand unique players, we’re about to start our sixth championship season. Videogame events have become a programming staple for all ages. We average one 3-event gaming weekend per month plus some bonus events and open-play opportunities here and there, with different games and tournament formats for different audiences. It’s a stable, repeatable, high-quality part of what goes on at AADL.

Well, so what? Sure, we can get a hundred teenage boys into the library on a Friday night, but so would a stripper, right? Sure, we're bringing in new library users and showing them that the library can be cool, but so would any event that gives away free money, right? Yes, we're reaching out to an underserved audience and making them feel welcome.

But are they checking out any BOOKS?

Anyone who's tried to get gaming embraced by reluctant colleagues has heard these sorts of questions. It's hard to stretch a narrow view of what a library should be solely based on how much fun it is to play *Rock Band*. When cultivating buy-in among nongamers, or when defending an established program against the protestations of crabby apples, it can be tantalizing to trot out some killer stats that show that your monthly smash fests have resulted in a 300 percent increase in checkouts of ponderous period dramas and a 600 percent increase in FirstSearch queries.

That would show 'em, huh?

It's not going to happen. It doesn't work that way! Unless your library is a very quiet place (and who ever heard of a quiet library?), any increased library use that results from a successful gaming event is going to be swallowed up by the general ebb and flow of library circulation; a blip on a bump isn't going to prove anything to naysayers. That's trying to measure 21st-century library use with 20th-century metrics; increasingly, the most valuable uses of the library don't show up on any of our spreadsheets. Library fans are made one at a time, and we've found that gaming events are a very efficient way to make those one-on-one unmeasurable moments happen with high frequency among difficult audiences. But it's still a challenge to measure the cumulative effect, primarily because our input/output-based metrics doesn't measure at all the things that brand managers have been obsessing about for as long as there have been brand managers: how people feel about our brand, and how our actions change those feelings on an individual-by-individual basis.

It's far more important to change how patrons feel about the library than to change how they use the library, especially when how they use the library is already changing every day . . . whether you like it or not.

Impressions and Perceptions

Changing how patrons feel about the library can be a real challenge when they feel that the library is not adequate. There are a lot of reasons that a member of a library's service area might feel that their library is inferior or has nothing of interest. Potential patrons can also think that the library so thoroughly fails to understand their needs that they assume that even if the library did something of interest, that it would somehow mess it up. Also prevalent

is the idea that libraries as institutions have been made obsolete or vestigial by the rise of the Internet. As library people, we know that these impressions are unfair at their best and flat out incorrect at their worst, but that does not make the impression irrelevant or ignorable.

One of the preexisting conditions that we often encounter from gamers who come to their first gaming event at the library is outright shock that the library would do something so appealing, and do it right. We often get questions like "So the LIBRARY owns this equipment?!" and "You actually WORK at the LIBRARY?!" and "Nintendo didn't put this together"? We can actually watch the perception of the library that people bring into the room fall away as the bounds of what they might find in the building are instantaneously expanded.

Libraries have known for decades that our missions are well-served when we not only provide access to content, but also provide to our patrons an opportunity to consume content socially. Fans of book discussions know this well, but people who don't much like to talk about books may not realize how rewarding it can be to participate in a community event centered around content that they are passionate about. This traditional library function will serve us well in the 21st century, as the question "Where will I get it?" becomes moot and "What can I do with it?" takes center stage. Every patron who comes to a gaming event leaves with a redefined sense of what the library is: no longer just a storehouse of content, but a place where like minds can rally around that content.

Every time you can change a reluctant patron's perception of the library for the better, the library benefits—maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and for the rest of that patron's life. You cannot put a value on that moment of conversion, and no survey can capture it. We've found that gaming events make those moments happen for a wide range of people and convert indifference into enthusiasm.

Here are some of the changes of heart we've seen at our events.

Before:

- The library sucks.
- The library has nothing of interest.
- The library would do it wrong.
- Who needs libraries anymore?

After:

- The library is awesome!
- The library has exactly what I'm into!
- The library does it better than anyone!
- The library gives me something I can't get anywhere else!

Community

Ever since we started banging the rocks together, old people have been saying that young people have no sense of community. That's nuts.

Young people are all about community; it's just usually a different type of community than what the elders had in mind. This perennial grumble has been given new dimension by the social media boom, which has given the whippersnappers weird new tools and odd relationship forms that have old names but new meanings. Regardless, community is a big part of a young person's life, and the library is rarely a center point for that community.

We've found that our events and gaming blogs have allowed a tight-knit community of players to form with the library at its center and library staff as sought-after nodes in that network. Now that library staff can no longer act as gatekeepers to a world of content, we need to become participants in the networks that grow around that content.

People who are passionate about gaming want to have conversations about their passion, just like any other enthusiast, and one of the most positive epiphanies that a gamer can have is that there are people working at the library who are into what they are into, can talk knowledgeably about it, and can even bring new insights or tidbits into the shared knowledge pool. I've seen kids be forcibly dragged away from an event still yammering at me about the finer details of their favorite Pokémon, or kids on the street asking me if I've played some new demo yet. For gamers to see library staff as knowledgeable, enthusiastic coexplorers of a world of ideas brings them up to where the book people have been for years.

The communities that form around gaming events at the library can be pervasive if you give them a place to continue online. The skill level and knowledge of the community will continuously accrue and take on a life of its own; before you know it, you'll have young people visiting the library website every day just to see what's going on in the communities with which they are most engaged. Again, it may be difficult to see more overall website use as a result of giving your gaming community an online home, but every one of those players who make a post to the library's gaming community has become significantly more engaged with the institution than before, and more engaged with their community because of the library's efforts. And if you make a post about the results of a gaming event and tell the attendees to watch for it, you are almost guaranteed to get at least a few public comments that may still be elusive on your blog.

Before:

- There is no one I like to hang out with at the library.
- My scene is not welcome at the library.
- My town has no scene.

- My community doesn't value me.

After:

- I can meet cool new people at the library.
- My town does have a scene, and the library is part of it!
- My interests are valued by the community, and the library proves it.

Civic Gaming Experiences

The 2008 Pew Internet and American Life Project report *Teens, Video Games, and Civics* examined how civic engagement and game play interact in teens' lives. The report states

Many experiences in game play are similar to classroom-based civic learning opportunities. Those playing games often simulate civic action, help or guide other players, participate in guilds or other groups associated with the game, learn about social issues, and grapple with ethical issues.³

These civic gaming experiences correlate strongly with greater civic engagement in young people, and the study found that the more frequently players had civic gaming experiences, the more likely they were to be engaged in their community. Either interestingly or unsurprisingly (depending on where you're coming from), the study also found that "playing games with others in person was related to civic and political outcomes, but playing with others online was not" and that "the quantity of game play was not strongly related to teens interest or engagement in civic and political activity."⁴

Whew! Good news for gaming and young people, huh? And very helpful to make a case for gaming at the library. But again, can you readily measure the change in an event attendee's engagement in their community? Or find out which of your gamers later tried to give or raise money for charity as a result of attending your event? These patterns show up in large, rigorous studies, but if you predicate your gaming success on finding proof in this pudding, it's not going to happen. It's an impact that Pew has thankfully discovered that you would be hard pressed to demonstrate at a single library.

So the best course of action is to maximize the opportunities for gamers to have these civic gaming experiences through your events and through your online community, and rest assured that these actions will make both a collective and an individual impact for both patrons and the library, even if you can't prove it!

These opportunities happen best when library staff members set a helpful, welcoming, and relaxed tone but aren't afraid to trot out consequences for antisocial behav-

ior. We've had significant success in converting behavior problems into solutions simply because the kids are so invested in the event that they want to please the staff and advance closer to the inner circle. We encourage the veteran players to help out the newbies, which many of them would do anyway, and we make sure that they know that we don't like it when they're being jerks to each other. It's establishing this constructive, positive atmosphere that makes gaming events such a powerful part of a library's services.

Kids are encouraged to help each other. That's the foundation of civic engagement.

Online, it's a little more complicated, but a light touch in moderating the discussions your players have on your blogs and a dedication to setting a good example and a high standard can pay off when the players themselves become champions of the positive atmosphere, representing your perspective independently because they want to help. Civic engagement begins with discourse on critical community issues, and there is nothing more critical to your community of players than whether or not you allow items in *Super Smash Bros.* matches. You can encourage them to think communally by telling them that the library wants the events to be fun for a wide range of players. They can understand that, even if they are totally hardcore players who want rulesets that squash noobish hopes.

However, some of the most powerful impacts that can happen in your online community come when your players want you to institute a change in the rules. By requiring them to make cogent, informed online arguments in support of their position and telling them directly that "this sucks" is not going to convince anyone, you raise the level and the intent of the discourse among your community and teach them a very important lesson about civics: if they are calm, informed, and reasonable, they can effect change, especially if they build consensus along the



Figure 3
Ann Arbor (MI) District Library gamers with Eli Neiburger

way. It's something that their teachers insist is possible but that they have very little opportunity to practice in a meaningful situation. This benefit that library gaming can bring to young people's lives is immeasurable. Here are a few of the transformations in behavior and community focus that we've seen in individuals on the blog:

Before:

- Fronting, talking trash, and insulting others.
- Saying "This sucks and it's stupid."
- Arguing that no serious players will play by these rules.
- Using inappropriate language or generally being jerks.

After:

- Finding ways to tout their superiority while respecting their opponents.
- Making solid arguments with examples to prove their point.
- Understanding that library events are for everyone, not just them.
- Self-censoring and thinking before they post.

National Gaming Day and Beyond

Most teenagers will feel that their hometown "sucks" at some point.

It's the grass-is-always-greener syndrome combined with the general challenges of being that age; it's hard not to feel that everything would be great if only they lived elsewhere. Pride in the community makes for a vested interest in the welfare and future of that community, but how many young people feel proud of their town, let alone their library? Gaming can produce opportunities for healthy community pride that is meaningful to young people, both through feeling pride for their library for having something cool and fun, and also by paving the way for interlibrary competition that can rile up crosstown or crosscountry rivalry without the stakes being so high.

Last November, ALA organized the first ever National Gaming Day @ Your Library, and AADL was fortunate to organize a national *Super Smash Bros.* tournament for thirty-two libraries around the country. While this first time out was not without its substantial technical challenges, reports came in from the participating libraries that their throngs of gamers were engaged as never before, thrilled to hear the results win or lose, and wildly cheering their success gathered around their hometown champions. This is big! There is a reason that sports are a central component of our culture. Humans enjoy competition and love to rally around a common cause. How often does that kind of thing happen at the library? And how often do the kids who will never make the football

team have the opportunity to fight for their community's honor . . . at the LIBRARY? There's no other content that I've seen consumed at libraries in a way that elicits such passion, excitement, and fervor for the library and for the hometown hero.

National Gaming Day showed gamers in a meaningful way that the library is an access point to the world. Isn't that what we've been doing for centuries? You may not be able to measure the way that lives were changed on that day, but if you could hear the cheering kids, united with library staff towards a common goal and wide-eyed with enthusiasm, you would have no doubt that these kids were a part of something big . . . at the library. That's one great unmeasurable!

Lessons Learned

- The library brand is not books—it's transformation. For traditionally underserved teens (especially boys), gaming in libraries can be a transformational experience that will stay with them throughout their adult lives.
- Gaming in general provides opportunities for civic engagement for today's youth, and libraries offer even stronger social spaces and connections for communal play and interactions.
- Libraries can provide scaffolding experiences around gaming that improve teens' civic discourse and behavior to a level not experienced elsewhere in the community.
- Gaming tournaments model positive competition and connect teens as a community and to the larger community.

Notes

1. Response to online survey, posted on News about Games and Gaming, Nov. 25, 2008, <http://gaming.ala.org/news/2008/11/25/national-gaming-day-a-success> (accessed March 20, 2009).
2. Online Computer Library Center, *From Awareness to Funding: A Study of Library Support in America* (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2008).
3. Amanda Lenhart et al., *Teens, Video Games, and Civics* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008), 5–6.
4. *Ibid.*, vi.