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1st Prize for Esports for Social Good

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Esport's Legacy of Social Good

Esports has been and will continue to be there for everyone. Forming bonds with your guildmates in MMORPGs or through random solo queue interactions, video games can form some of the unlikeliest of friendships. From small scale stories like making friends at a new school to intercontinental friendships, Esports thrives because of its anonymity and its ability to connect globally. With what happened during 2020, Esports has never played a larger part in connecting people. Esports has had a rough history with toxicity being the more public side and while the rise of Valorant has certainly helped with curbing the issue with high level diversity lets not forget those that have worked hard for the current and still improving status quo. This paper will consist of three sections in an attempt to highly the diversity and social good that Esports has done. The first section will be Esport's fight against mental illness, followed by women in Esports and lastly multiculturalism in Esports.

Events like Play with Heart, a Super Smash Bros Melee and Ultimate tournament held in Vancouver in 2019 that raised \$12,443 for the Canadian Mental Health Association (SSB Wiki) demonstrate the scene's capacity for aiding community and the general population. Mental illness has been with the gaming community from the start (Healthy Gamer), and it's important it gets the attention it deserves. Depression and other mental illnesses have become more socially acceptable to talk about with streamers like Bryon "Reckful" Bernstein, Gosu and Alie "Grossgore" Larsen having talked about their struggle with it on stream. The loss of Reckful sent a true wakeup call through the video game community, with many charity events growing in the wake of this, such as Joedat "Voyboy" Esfahnani's \$40,000 charity stream and Zack "Asmongold" \$15,000 donation both of which going towards suicide prevention. With video games serving as a coping mechanism for many (Healthy Gamer), the Esports community has begun trying their best to help combat the issue. Large Esports organizations have begun hiring psychologists and other staff to help their players. Misfits, the NA based organization, first started with their EU league of legends team but have since spread their resources to all employees (Stubbs). Misfits is aware that it's not only their players but their staff they have to look after, they care about more than just the monetary potential of Esports and care about the individuals that comprise the scene. Esports is now serving as a means to spread awareness for mental health. The National Institute of Mental Health Disorders says that 29.4% of young adults age 18-25 and 25% of those 26-49 suffer from at least one mental illness. According to J. Clement, over 50% of the gaming population falls within this age range. Even without considering that gamers appear to be at higher risk for mental illness (Healthy Gamer), there is a large portion of the population that does suffer and the Esports scene's effort to promote

awareness and provide funding is what makes Esports such a powerful tool for positive change. Play with Heart was run by the UBC Esports Association and serves as an example for the impact that university students and APRU fellowship members are capable of making.

As mentioned earlier, Esports does more than just fight against mental health. Esports has a long history of female gamers. There are the more recent rosters like V alorant's recent C9 White to the older teams like CS:GO's SK ladies dating back to 2003. Or individual players participating in the highest level of play like Se-yeon "Geguri" Kim who played in the Overwatch League for the Shanghai Dragons. Geguri is a highly accomplished female player in a very male dominated team sport, there was controversy surrounding her skill as accusations of her cheating were rampant. At the age of 17 she dispelled those accusations and proved that she was truly world competitor level. She went on to have five first place finishes, one second place and one third place finish during her time on the dragons. The title of most decorated female player now belongs to Geguri, the title of most decorated trans woman and holder of the previous title of most decorated female in esports goes to Sarah "Scarlett" Hostyn. Scarlett became the first woman to win a Starcraft II major with her win at Intel Extreme Masters Season 12 in 2018. It should also be noted that she was the Canadian representative at the event as it was supported by the International Olympic Committee and took place less than a week before the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Hopefully Scarlett and Geguri serve as a sample of more women at the highest level of competitive Esports.

Esports also has an issue with diversity. While the more popular computer gaming scene has very few black players, Zaqueri "Aphromoo" Black and Steven "Kodak" Rosenberger being the two most famous (Johnson). One can turn to the fighting games community (FGC) to find more ethnic diversity. While they've had their fair share of controversies and issues over the year, it still serves as one of the most diverse scenes in all of competitive Esports. From players like Dominique "SonicFox" McLean who have competed in 11 unique games at the highest level available, to Pakistani Tekken player Arslan "Arslan Ash" Siddique. Arslan Ash is the 2019 Evo winner for Tekken 7 and in a scene historically dominated by Japanese and South Korean players he was a true underdog. Having just gotten off his flight from Pakistan, he overcame numerous tournament favourites to achieve his victory and put the Pakistani Tekken community on the map. SonicFox is an American FGC player, they happen to also be a furry. A rare site in the gaming community, SonicFox can often be seen at events donning their iconic blue fox tail and hat with blue fox ears. They serve as an example for the diversity and acceptance in the FGC and is one of the few capable of achieving first place finishes in over five unique fighting games.

While each of the players mentioned in this paper are worthy of their own documentary, this paper serves as a highlight reel for Esport's diversity and social good. Other organizations that expand on diversity are Letta J. 's Coexist Gaming and Keshia Walker's Women Got Game and Black Collegiate Gaming Association. Both of which serve to provide opportunities to women of colour in Esports. This is the legacy that Esports has built. This is the legacy that we can add to.

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