AnyKey

Report on the AnyKey Initiative, 2015-2017

Background

AnyKey – an initiative in collaboration with Intel and the Electronic Sports League (ESL) – is an advocacy organization dedicated to supporting diverse participation in esports. Its mission is to help create fair and inclusive spaces in esports for marginalized members of the gaming community. We seek to provide competitive gamers with resources, support, and opportunities, highlight positive role-models, and create knowledge and tools to help create more diverse communities and supportive networks. The organization soft launched with its first workshop and public panel at TwitchCon in September 2015 and followed up with an official launch via broadcast from the ESL Burbank studios in March 2016.

The organization is co-directed by T.L. Taylor (professor of Comparative Media Studies at MIT) who handles the research arm while Morgan Romine (Ph.D. Anthropology, UC Irvine) manages the initiatives side. Given the training of both directors, the organizational structure reflects the founding commitment of the project to data-driven engagement. Undertaking research into key issues affecting inclusivity in esports then developing out various initiatives to address areas identified as critically important and actionable is central to our approach. The organization sees this linkage of real on-the-ground data with concrete projects as critical to meaningful change.

Funding is currently primarily through Intel. This money covers the (part-time) salary for Morgan Romine and various projects we take up. Prof Taylor receives no salary, though part of AnyKey's startup money funded a graduate student through 2016. In 2015 Prof. Taylor was awarded a small amount of money from the ReFiG grant (a project sponsored the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada) for fieldwork to Dreamhack in Sweden and then, in 2016, received 50% funding from the grant (matched by MIT) for a Masters level graduate student for two years to assist in work related to AnyKey. In 2017 we also received a modest amount from Oculus for several convention activations. The organization – not formally a non-profit though operationally so – is currently at the end of its initial primary funding cycle and looking for new support.

Activities

AnyKey has been extremely active on a number of fronts over the last two years. In addition to sponsoring several women-only professional tournaments we have held a number of private stakeholder workshops, fielded research at live events, produced whitepapers, run a number of activations at gaming conventions, hosted public panels, profiled role-models, offered consultations to other organizations or formally supported them, and built an affiliate program. One of the foundational principles of AnyKey is our commitment to work at a range of levels, via a variety of approaches, and with organizations we can partner with to help amplify their work. While there have long been women-only tournaments in esports, we believe real growth in diversity and inclusion, as well as long-lasting cultural change, will only be achieved by addressing the symbolic *and* organizational – this means everything from prompting role models to how events are structured. Below is an overview our activities over the last two years.

AnyKey Activities Sept 2015 – Sept 2017

Workshops	
Private sessions of 10 - 12 stakeholders; focused on identifying key critical areas and action points that can be developed in local context/organizations.	*Women in Esports*, September 2015. Participants included pro players, ESL, Blizzard, and other community members and industry professionals. *Barriers to Inclusion and Retention: Community Management and Moderation*, April 2016. Participants included Twitch, ESL, and other community members and industry professionals. *Diversity and Inclusion in Collegiate Esports*, October 2016. Participants included ESL, Blizzard, RMU, UC Irvine, PAC12, TeSPA organizers, and several academic researchers.
Event fieldwork	IEM San Jose, November 2015. DreamHack Sweden, June 2016. Primarily involved connecting up with members of the Swedish gaming organization Sverok and discussing/observing their best practices on diversity and inclusion initiatives. Boston Major, December 2016.
Whitepapers	*Women in Esports*, published October 2015. http://www.anykey.org/wp-content/uploads/Women-in-Esports-whitepaper.pdf. IEM San Jose, published January 2016 - http://www.anykey.org/wp-content/uploads/Esports-event-participation-whitepaper.pdf. *Barriers to Inclusion and Retention: Community Management and Moderation*, published April 2016. http://www.anykey.org/wp-content/uploads/Barriers-to-Inclusion-whitepaper.pdf. *Diversity and Inclusion in Collegiate Esports*, published November 2016. http://www.anykey.org/wp-content/uploads/Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-Collegiate-Esports.pdf. *Gender Inclusion in Esports: Best Practices Guidelines*, published December 2017. http://www.anykey.org/wp-content/uploads/Gender-best-practices.pdf.
Tournaments	Intel Challenge Women's CSGO Championship @ IEM Katowice, 2016. (8 teams, $30k prize pool, 55k stream viewers, 100%+ YoY increase) AnyKey Women's CSGO Invitational @ IEM Oakland, 2016. (2 teams, $10k prize pool) Intel Challenge Women's CSGO Championship @ IEM Katowice, 2017. (8 teams, $30k prize pool)

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Panels & talks	Women in Esports, TwitchCon 2015. Viewable at https://www.twitch.tv/videos/17809341?t=. Carrying Through College: The Current Climate of Collegiate Esports, Game Developers Conference 2015.
	AnyKey Public Launch livestreamed from ESL Burbank Studios 2016. Viewable at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1605&v=UrS80s5eq30.
	Competition for All, PAX East 2016. Viewable at https://www.twitch.tv/videos/62138024.
	Riot Research Summit (private invite only event) 2016 (T.L. Taylor)
	Being a Woman in Esports, Indiecade 2016 (Morgan Romine).
	Career Paths into Game Development, ComicCon 2016 (Morgan Romine, panelist).
	Online Harassment Workshop (private invite only event) 2016 (T.L. Taylor)
	Running an Esports Tournament, Game Developer's Conference, 2016 (Morgan Romine and Stephanie Harvey).
	Intel Hack Harassment Workshop 2016 (private invite only event) (T.L. Taylor).
	5 Myths in 5 Minutes, Game Developer's Conference, 2017 (T.L. Taylor).
	!permit: Tips and Tricks for Better Chat, TwitchCon 2016. Viewable at https://www.twitch.tv/videos/92246257?t=46m00s.
	Code Switch: Diversity Behind the Scene, ComicCon 2017 (Morgan Romine, panelist).
	On the Fields, In the Stands: The Future of Women and eSports, UCIrvine 2017. (T.L. Taylor).
	Women in eSports: How to Get Involved in Competitive Gaming, GeekGirlCon 2017.
"All Stars" profile series of role models	Sabina "Lawliepop" Hemmi, Co-founder of Elo entertainment & Dotabuff – http://www.anykey.org/anykey-all-stars-sabina-lawliepop-hemmi/
	Christine "Potter" Chi, CLG Red – http://www.anykey.org/anykey-all-stars-christine-potter-chi/. Award: 2017 Communicator Awards of Excellence, Video-Documentary for Online Video.
	Corey Rosemond, Global Business Development Director for Plantronics – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgpRTLiMimY.

	Angie Klingsieck, Executive Director of Crimson Gaming at the University of Utah – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx_V3RNtgpk.

Jaycie "Gillyweed" Gluck, Esports commentator and streamer – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05NOb5MkKvg. |
| **Event Activations**

Booth space for outreach, sometimes involves partnering with affiliated orgs like Smash Sisters, Online SOS, I Need Diverse Games, etc. | TwitchCon 2015
PAX East 2016
PAX Prime 2016
TwitchCon 2016
IEM Oakland 2016
IEM Katowice 2016
DreamHack Austin 2017
PAX East 2017
PAX South 2017
PAX Prime 2017
GeekGirlCon 2017
TwitchCon 2017

Smash Sisters sponsorships:
TwitchCon 2016
PAX East 2017
Genesis 2017
Super Smash Con 2017
Shine 2017
GeekGirlCon 2017 |
| **Affiliates Program**

Our affiliates represent some of the most inclusive communities and individual content creators in gaming. Our team is full of people and communities who support our Keystone Code, and they happily welcome those willing to welcome others. | Launched in 2016.

Currently has 24 members including individuals and organizations. These range from esports organizations such as Smash Sisters, CounterLogic Gaming, Team Dignitas, Desoladies to individuals such as Stephanie Harvey, Steph "Oddish" Loehr, Jaycie "Gillyweed" Gluck, and Terrance Miller We also partner with initiatives like I Need Diverse Games and Spawn on Me.

Full list at http://www.anykey.org/affiliates/. |
| **Code of Conduct** | "Keystone Code" published 2016. Available at http://www.anykey.org/keystone-code/.

Adopted for launch of UC Irvine Esports Arena, 2016.

Adopted for Robert Morris University's collegiate team, 2016.

SKYLLA CS:GO Tournament Series, 2016 & 2017.

Consulted with TwitchCon for their CoC, 2016 & 2017.

Adopted for Oculus, 2017. |

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Press Coverage Selection of notable coverage	AnyKey launch announcement covered by *Fortune*, *Gamasutra*, *PCGamer*, *Rock Paper Shotgun*, *Game Industry Biz*, *Tech Raptor*, and many other outlets. AnyKey on a year spent advancing the cause of diversity in esports. *PCGamer*, 2016. http://www.pcgamer.com/anykey-on-a-year-spent-advancing-the-cause-of-diversity-in-esports/. Esports sees profit in attracting female gamers. *The New York Times*, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/21/technology/personaltech/video-game-makers-try-to-get-better-at-luring-women-to-esports.html. Three ways esports can become an even bigger business. *Los Angeles Times*, 2016. http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-esports-milken-20160504-snap-htmlstory.html. Women aren't actually worse at video games: Why the stereotype is harmful. *Christian Science Monitor*, 2016. https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2016/0712/Women-aren-t-actually-worse-at-video-games-Why-the-stereotype-is-harmful. Morgan Romine on the history of women in esports." *Zam*, 2017. http://www.zam.com/article/1409/morgan-romine-on-the-history-of-women-in-esports. Women trying to gain a foothold in esports. *SF Chronicle*, 2017. http://www.sfchronicle.com/sports/article/Women-trying-to-gain-a-foothold-in-e-sports-10904199.php. What brands are doing to attract female esports players. *AList*, 2017. http://www.alistdaily.com/strategy/what-brands-are-doing-to-attract-female-esports-players/. With gender disparity in esports, researchers look for ways to close the gap. *Polygon*, 2017. https://www.polygon.com/2016/3/16/11243526/esports-gender-gap-women-events-gdc-2016. What's the score on gender diversity in esports? *The Next Web*, 2017. https://thenextweb.com/gaming/2017/03/08/whats-the-score-on-gender-diversity-in-esports/#.tnw_sC7QVMbE. College esports are trying to go co-ed, but trolls might ruin everything. *Vice*, 2017. https://news.vice.com/article/college-esports-are-trying-to-go-co-ed-but-trolls-might-ruin-everything. A gamer channel's mission: Send the trolls packing. *The New York Times*, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/technology/personaltech/a-gamer-channels-mission-send-the-trolls-packing.html. So you want to be a competitive gamer? *GeekWire*, 2017. https://www.geekwire.com/2017/want-competitive-gamer-women-esports-offer-advice-encourage-women/.

	Women in esports: Ignore the stereotypes and do what you want. *The Guardian*, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2017/jun/08/women-esports-gaming-cyberbullying. AnyKey's unique approach to tackling gaming toxicity. Esports Edition, 2017. https://esportsedition.com/general/anykey-glhf-pledge-gaming-toxicity/.
Social Media Outreach	A remarkable 267, 596 people took AnyKey's "GLHF" ("good luck, have fun") pledge. In conjunction with Intel, Twitch, and Oculus, we ran a campaign to have people sign a pledge of good conduct in online gaming spaces and VR. If they tied their Twitch account to the sign-up they would get a badge in Twitch (through end of 2017). http://www.anykey.org/take-the-pledge/. Active on Twitter (@anykeyorg) and Facebook (AnyKeyOrg). We also host a Discord server for community members to connect up to each other. A Google Analytics sample of our website visitor demographics (Sept 2016): Male: 54% Female: 46% 18-14: 27.5% 25-34: 35.5% 35-44: 15.5% 45+: 23.5% New visitors: 78.4% Returning: 21.6% Primarily U.S. 58%
Other Notables	Morgan Romine serves on the board for UC Irvine Esports Advisory Board 2016-present. T.L. Taylor was a speaker and attendee at a private invite-only White House event on diversity in gaming, 2016.

Impact Assessment

AnyKey has very quickly become a "go to" organization for issues related to diversity and inclusion in esports. We get consistent feedback that more and more people in both gaming and the esports sectors feel this is an important area for growth. There are four prongs that have built this reputation: 1) our workshops with key industry professionals and whitepapers, 2) our sponsorship of the women's CSGO Intel Challenge, 3) our outreach at conventions and via conference panels, and 4) our press coverage and social media presence.

From the beginning AnyKey has worked with key community and industry stakeholders to identify central critical issues and work toward solutions. The benefits of our workshops have not only been in tackling important challenges and brainstorming solutions, but in building connections with industry professionals who are working in their own organizations on these topics. Though our workshops are small their network reach is significant. For example, at our MIT workshop we calculate that the 16 industry experts present end up resulting in 120 connections. These network effects are helpful in converting workshop analysis into action. For example, our Code of Conduct was developed after workshop conversations about the importance of non-harassing spaces. The Code has in turn been taken up by organizations like Robert Morris University and UC Irvine, as well as newer non-esports partners like Oculus. In addition to our work with ESL on events such as the Intel Challenge, DreamHack reached out to us to partner with them (resulting in our doing an activation at DreamHack Austin 2017).

This commitment to working with organizations, and being recognized as a valuable partner to do so, is also evidenced through our Affiliates program. Launched in 2016 the program has already very quickly grown to boast 24 members. Affiliates are individuals and organization that endorse the AnyKey mission and Code of Conduct and, in turn, we work to amplify their own activities. Several notable AnyKey Affiliates in the esports space are pro teams CLG and Team Dignitas, while on the individual level we support players and streamers such as Stephanie Harvey and Terrance Miller.

Working with our Affiliates has been an important part of our initiative. For example, we have extensively partnered with Smash Sisters which was launched in 2016 by Emily Sun and Lil Chen "to bring new and veteran Smash gals together in order to boost overall competitive participation." One of the main tenets of AnyKey is to build and amplify existing projects that are tackling diversity and inclusion issues (rather than recreating the wheel). We've now partnered with Smash Sisters for four events (and done minor support for them at two) ranging from broad gaming spaces (such as PAX East) to esports & fighting-game focused events like DreamHack Austin and Shine. We see our work with them as one of the strongest outcomes of the initiative thus far.

Our outreach at conventions and through public panels has also proven to be valuable. Through these opportunities we have reached hundreds of gamers and shared information and best practices about building inclusive communities. We are incredibly proud and gratified by the success of our GLHF pledge campaign which brought in over a quarter of a million signatures. One other prime example of our success in this domain has been our partnership in working with Twitch for their annual conference. AnyKey is an anchor at the TwitchCon conference; we were a key part of "Inclusivity City" in 2016 and they asked us to return in 2017 to be a member of the "Twitch Unity" space. In these spaces we not only convey the mission of AnyKey, but have also brought Smash Sisters to the event and offered Affiliates meet-up opportunities. We've also offered several live streamed panels at the convention to talk about challenges and best practices.

We also regularly present on inclusivity in esports and best practices at industry conferences such as the annual Game Developers Conference. In these spaces we are able to share, and often informally consult with, game developers who are interested in esports but often wary of the reputation it has. We regularly we find ourselves talking to people who want to bring esports to their organization or game but are unsure about issues around harassment and are relieved to hear about the work we are doing.

Bringing key challenges, and potential solutions, into broader public conversation has also been an important part of our profile thus far. We are regularly sought out to provide expert quotes and insight in a range of press (from *The New York Times* to *Polygon*). Our social media presence is also a place where we are regularly doing public-facing work on inclusivity. These in turn have often prompted companies and organizations to reach out to us for private consultations on issues. The result of these activities in a wide range of domains is that AnyKey

has become a "go to" organization focused on inclusivity and diversity not only in esports, but gaming more broadly.

Growth & Next Steps

AnyKey has very quickly ramped up its activities and now face a key growth point where we find ourselves with many more opportunities than just Morgan and T.L. can say "yes" to on their own. Our commitment to not only doing important symbolic/public-facing work but real institutional change also weighs heavily on the organization going forward. There are three key areas of growth & focus for the next two-year period:

1. <u>Scaling up</u>. More operational support and standardizing some procedures so they can be better handed off to others is key. Especially around conventions, Morgan is spending upwards of 60% of her time on administrative details which detracts from higher level attention to other projects. We need better support and processes for administrative support so that she isn't spending time with operational details (shipping, booking travel, etc). This dovetails to more robust mechanisms to support and fund Affiliates at events activations.

2. <u>Training & Outreach</u>. Building out our capacity to address real organizational needs our partners are seeking help on is key. In particular, creating training programs on diversity and inclusion in esports that can be rolled out to industry orgs is central in our next phase. This will involve helping train tournament admins on best practices around diversity and inclusion, as well as helping organizations tackle this domain internally. We are regularly contacted by organizations seeking consultation on how to concretely make positive change internally and ramping up a formal program to help is crucial. This also involves building up allyship training, as well as working with our collegiate team partners to bring meaningful education around diversity and inclusion.

3. <u>Active Engagement</u>. We've done a great job disseminating information at various events but want to make sure the "action" component of AnyKey is not lost. This means making sure we aren't just tabling at conventions but doing active engagements such as panels, tournaments, "friendlies," and other concrete activities. A large component of this is transforming some of our nascent connections into more meaningful partnerships – working more with esports organizations that love what we are doing and want to partner together on new activities (such a co-ed collegiate tournaments).

AnyKey is well positioned to help make meaningful cultural and institutional change. Our first two years have proven to be incredibly productive and we see this as deeply tied to the real need within the esports industry to tackle challenges around diversity and inclusion. Time and again partners within that space reach out to us expressing their wish to make things better, to grow participation, and to create a future where everyone has the ability to participate in competitive gaming. AnyKey continues to see itself as an important part of charting that path.