Alliance for Childhood London Forum

14th February 2020 City Hall, London

18 participants. 5 apologies

Henrietta Bowden-Jones was unwell therefore unable to participate. Her colleagues stood in at short notice, which was much appreciated.

Olivia Nettleton Revealing Reality

The biggest change in gaming use came when gaming was included in smart phones. At first children worked together in groups, now they have more equipment, e.g. headphones and consoles and don't come together in person so much. Some play up to 9hours a day, but mainly it is 1 - 2 hours. The most popular games include Fortnite. Apps on their phones vary for boys and girls.

Revealing Reality undertook a study for the Children's Commissioner for England. They questioned 29 children aged 10 - 16 years. The games they play are Robex, Minecraft, Fortnite, FIFA,Call of Duty and Black Ops 4. They observed the children in their homes and asked them to keep a diary. Children spoke of the benefits such as socialising and meeting challenges. It was an extension of normal play. Their social lives are linked to gaming because they do not go out.

Bullying occurs, eg if using default avatars. Many are aware of the risks of sharing data with strangers. Time spent is 2 - 3 hours a day as they get older, maybe longer. They are aware of addiction especially at exam time when they realise that time spent on gaming has distracted them from studying. They say they could go to friends to see if they would like to play outside, but that means persuading the friends to stop gaming and go out too.

Results of study
- Children can spend up to £300 a year.
- There is peer pressure to spend more. In FIFA for example, they are encouraged to spend more to progress further. They are aware packs can contain helpful players or not.
- Gaming is changing children's relationship to money.
- The lack of guarantee of a reward felt like gambling.
- They were not sure how much they were spending.
- Rules need to be the same as for their offline lives gambling is not allowed there. This needs to be monitored.
- Violence did not come out much.

Link to Study www.revealingreality.co.uk/work/gaming-the-system/

Dr. Rebecca Lockwood and Dr. Richard Pomfrie National Centre for Gaming Disorder

The Centre is treating children and young people who have Internet Gaming Disorder. A treatment manual has been developed and is being evaluated. Gaming disorder affects a small number of people. Spending an excessive time gaming is not necessarily addiction. It becomes addiction when the person is not able to control the behaviour or stop.

Gaming is immersive and can create a safe space with rules and structure. There is positive reinforcement - Games have exciting sounds. This gives a heightened sense of euphoria through the dopamine released. The social connection also makes it difficult to put down.

Excessive time spent gaming may be the result of problems in the real world, eg bullying, conflict in the home.
At the Centre they know the processes that make gaming addictive. The treatment model is based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy but the clinic also heavily involve the family in treatment.

They are treating a small number of people and are looking for more referrals. There are 2 new people for assessment, 5 in treatment. The age range is 13 - 25.

Reasons for addiction come from outside circumstances, such as pressure from school, and can be systemic. Some are more likely to develop problems than others. Different people are drawn to different games.

Link to website https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/10/children-treated-for-computer-gamingaddiction-under-nhs-long-term-plan/

George Osborne UKIE

It has been a difficult year for the tech industry.
How many people are gaming? Answer is about 1 Million.

There are 3 different types: simple (mobile games), PC games and console store. Fortnite is the most popular. Last person standing wins. Over Cooked is a cooking game for two people. It leads to arguments over who is responsible for what. Goose Game, horrible goose.

UKIE has 500 members in the tech industry, mainly SMEs.
66% are under 35 years
88% are graduates
22% are children

Designers do not think about parents. It is not a single coherent discipline.

Who play?
Over 32 Million, average age 47 years. It is a 40 year old industry. Average age playing mobile games is 50 - 60 years. Gender split is 48% female to 52% male.
How do people play and spend on games?
Most play on mobile devices. 11 - 64 year olds spend on average 10.3 hours a week. The average amount spent is £125 to £130 pa. Gamers want the game to be fun.

Regulation
First the concern was about content, now it is about context. People are beginning to see it is not ok. The FairPlay Alliance have a self regulation site 'About games for parents and carers.

Games and Children
Games encourage creativity and a sense of fun. They are important for children with disabilities if they are not able to get involved in physical play.
They spoke to children at a schools competition. They found that children who game are:

Positive Side
• More likely to get involved in sport
• More computer literate
• With Intermediate platform they converse through voice chat

Negative side.
• Not what industry wants
• Loot boxes are badly explained by the industry

Where is the middle ground? What are they doing about it?
Codify among developers eg say when games are for children, make sure regulations are met concerning rights and safety, be ethically and morally responsible, PEGI gambling indicator, use for games stimulating gambling, with loot boxes, disclose % odds.

- IKIE is working with UNICEF with research. Share data. Risk play becomes privatised.
- They are piloting a project with the University of Dundee on age appropriate games.
- They are developing reporting systems with the police. 'Get smart about play' involving Rio Ferdinand.
- They want parents to understand games and for parents to understand how to use parental controls, for example, on time and money children spend. Children are not aware. More research is needed to quantify. Children spend less than 20 Euro per month, some spend more.
- They need people to speak to games designers to point out where the problems are. We need to share concerns.
- They do not want to collect more data. They are not social media, collecting data about how children play.

Questions and discussion

Topics: Is there a link between lack of play and addiction? Relates to attachment theory. They have not looked specifically at play. The social anxiety model is not specific to gaming.
With games, children learn to form teams among other things. They can take the benefit of gaming.

There is bullying through Avatar skins. This is not acceptable. Offenders hide behind an identity. They look for a pattern of behaviour, relate it to risks in the real world. It is difficult. They need to develop skills in the real world.

Do they practice spiritual treatment? They meet families. Impact of smartphones on behaviour.

Children need to move. Play gives them the qualities lacking in addicted children. Make children aware of the limitation of their device. Find appropriate use. Digital 5-a-day, look at balance of different kinds of screen use. Set boundaries, agree times. Diversifying.

The Prince's Trust is engaging with young people. There is a patter in their actions. Be positive, there are skills, such as collaboration with other partners, which are transferable.

Does gaming prevent children from playing outside or do they not go out because of lack of safe play spaces and resort to gaming? Hard to say, it is a bit of both. They go out when there are opportunities e.g. to play football.

Jennifer Pridgeon The Screen Harmoniser

The screen harmoniser was designed by Jennifer to help parents persuade their children to leave their screens and play. It was exhibited during the session. You can read about it here:
https://www.letsconnectandfeelbetter.co.uk/lets-connect-screen-harmoniser

Jennifer has also pulled together research relating to screen addiction and addiction in general, which she used as part of the making of her product. You can read it here:
allianceforchildhoodorguk.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/evidence-based-sciencebehind-22screen-harmoniser22.pdf

Notes: Marion Briggs, edited by contributors