



Impact Report

2023



**Using the power
of video games to
bring people together**



Dear Friends and Partners,

We are thrilled to celebrate the 20th anniversary of this remarkable organization, AbleGamers. Starting as a vision in 2004 to make gaming accessible for everyone, regardless of disabilities, it has now evolved into a significant movement within the gaming industry.

Reflecting on the Journey

Our journey began in a time when accessible gaming was almost unknown. Initially, I aimed to assist players with disabilities, inspired by helping my best friend. However, the main barrier to play was not a lack of controllers, but poorly designed games.

People with disabilities often excel in creative problem-solving. Yet, we cannot fix software issues. The rapidly growing gaming industry had not fully considered players with disabilities' needs. We took on the role of advocates for accessibility in games, raising awareness among developers and companies and highlighting the immense potential of gamers with disabilities.

As the industry started embracing accessibility, we saw a transformative shift. Major game developers and console manufacturers now prioritize accessibility. In the last decade, major console manufacturers have created first-party controllers for players with disabilities. This shift allowed AbleGamers to focus on supporting players, the organization's original purpose.

Celebrating Milestones

AbleGamers has achieved numerous milestones. We have worked closely with game developers to shape more accessible games. Our Player Panels initiative bridges the gap between developers and gamers with disabilities, providing invaluable feedback. Player Panels is an exclusive opportunity for video game companies and players with disabilities to collaborate in testing and refining games through user research and development.

The evolution of our Peer Counseling team marks a significant development. As developers began focusing on accessibility, our team refocused their efforts. They have been crucial in providing one-on-one support, helping players with disabilities find the best gaming solutions. This approach has empowered individual gamers and given us deeper insights into our community's diverse needs. The AbleGamers Charity

has also provided many individuals with customized gaming setups, bringing joy through gaming.

A pivotal aspect of our work is promoting Accessible Player Experience (APX) design patterns. These principles have revolutionized game developers' approach to accessibility, making it integral to game design. APX design patterns enable developers to create inherently accessible games, opening gaming to a broader audience.

Looking to the Future

Our mission continues to evolve, aiming to break down all gaming barriers. We are currently developing the next phase of AbleGamers, planning to launch a new initiative in the spring that will supercharge our support for individual players with disabilities. We will keep supporting and refining our education methods for the next generation of game developers to create accessible experiences for all.

A Call to Action

On this significant anniversary, I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone supporting AbleGamers. Your role as a gamer, developer, donor, or volunteer is crucial in this journey.

However, there is more work to do. I urge everyone in the gaming community and beyond to join our mission to make gaming accessible for all. Your support, whether through donations, spreading awareness, or practicing inclusivity, can make a significant difference.

Conclusion

The 20th anniversary of AbleGamers marks a journey of progress, the strength of our community, and a hopeful future for inclusive gaming. Let's continue working together to break down barriers and empower everyone to game.

Thank you for being part of this incredible journey.



Mark Barlet
Founder, AbleGamers

OUR MISSION

Creating opportunities that enable play in order to combat social isolation, foster inclusive communities, and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

OUR VISION

A world where everyone, regardless of their disability, can experience the joy of gaming.



"Elliott is now able to play video games with his cousin and friends," his dad shared. "With the help of this controller, he is learning the skills he will need to participate in this great social activity throughout his life. Playing video games is also a very motivating activity that requires him to use both of his hands, which provides excellent passive occupational therapy benefits!"

"He is excited to play a turn-based Pokémon game with his Cousin. I am also hopeful that he will be able to play with the neighbor kids soon!"



What We Do



Peer Counseling

Our Peer Counseling team consists of players with disabilities and occupational professionals who work together to find the best solutions to enable play. An AbleGamers' Peer Counselor gets to know each individual to understand their unique needs. With the information, we identify the accessibility hurdles and provide resources and suggestions to facilitate play and engagement in the community spaces around gaming to create rich social experiences.



Engineering Research

Sometimes our Peer Counselors encounter barriers to play that current technology and options cannot meet. In these cases, we work with industry partners, makers, and research institutions to innovate new technology that can break down these barriers for a wide range of people.



Community and Inclusion

Community and Inclusion focuses on supporting, improving and cultivating opportunities that amplify the voices of players with disabilities and forge lifelong relationships. Our Community and Inclusion team works directly with the industry and supports community initiatives resulting in a more inclusive gaming community.



User Research

While our User Research team then works with these partners to evaluate games and other interactive media to ensure there are no barriers that keep people with disabilities from having the intended experience.



Professional Development

The Professional Development team works with our partners to give them the knowledge and skills needed to include our players into the experiences they are designing.

The AbleGamers professional services work with industry partners to ensure that disabled players are included in the experiences they create, be they traditional gaming, alternate realities or mobile.

The Team

Passionate and dedicated, our diverse team has a breadth of expertise. Drawing their knowledge from a variety of industries and backgrounds in an effort to enable play for people with disabilities.



Mark Barlet
Founder and
Executive Director



Steven Spohn
Sr. Director of
Development



Craig Kaufman
Sr. Director
of Community
and Inclusion



Christopher Power
Managing Director,
AbleGamers Canada



Christian Bernauer
Managing Director,
AbleGamers Brazil



Mark Burgess
Sr. Director
of Finance



Andy Wu
Sr. Director of
Peer Counseling



Cheryl Mitchell
Director of
User Research



Steve Weitz
Director of
Professional
Development



Jessie Hall
Sr. Peer Counselor



Kim RockVam
Director of Impact



Samus Wolfe
Sr. User Researcher



Vinny Santore
Program &
Marketing Admin



Aaron Price
Peer Counselor



Jameil Johnson
UX Researcher



Larry Ruston
Shipping Manager



Maggie Judge
Events Manager



Zach Runyan
Peer Counselor



Nina Parreiras
Marketing and
Social Media, Brazil



Fabricio Ferreira
Finance, Brazil



Felipe Negrão
Peer Counseling and
Operations, Brazil



Peer Counseling 2023

Our Peer Counselors get to know each person to understand their unique needs. They spend as much time as necessary, on average 14 hours per person. Peer Counseling sessions serve as a starting point for each individual's journey to game, empowering people to create rich social connections.

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
IMPACTED THROUGH ONE-ON-ONE
PEER COUNSELING SERVICES

3,318

HOURS OF PEER COUNSELING
RESULTING IN REDUCED OR
ELIMINATED BARRIERS TO PLAY

\$739,900

PEER COUNSELING SERVICES AND
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY EQUIPMENT
GRANTS PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS
TO FOSTER CONNECTION AND
REDUCE SOCIAL ISOLATION



Mobile in 2023

It's not just a game. It's countless communities and a lifetime of experiences that open up when play is possible for all.

To help us get more players gaming in the DC metro area, we are excited to announce that the AbleGamers van is officially on the road. Our van will help activate more Peer Counseling opportunities for players in the DC metro area.

The AbleGamers van will be onsite at events in the DC area as well as on the road to help enable our local Peer Counselors in their efforts to help players get their adaptive equipment properly installed.

The van acts as not only a vehicle to provide individual players with the hardware and support they need to play, but also as a gateway to a lifetime of rich social experiences that only video games can provide.

Because we know, it's so much more than just playing a video game. It's a way to experience joy, combat social isolation, build strong connections, and foster community.

Powered by AbleGamers

AbleGamers partners with various organizations, including hospitals and rehabilitation centers to provide equipment and training to reach many more people.

Thanks to the
generosity of our donors

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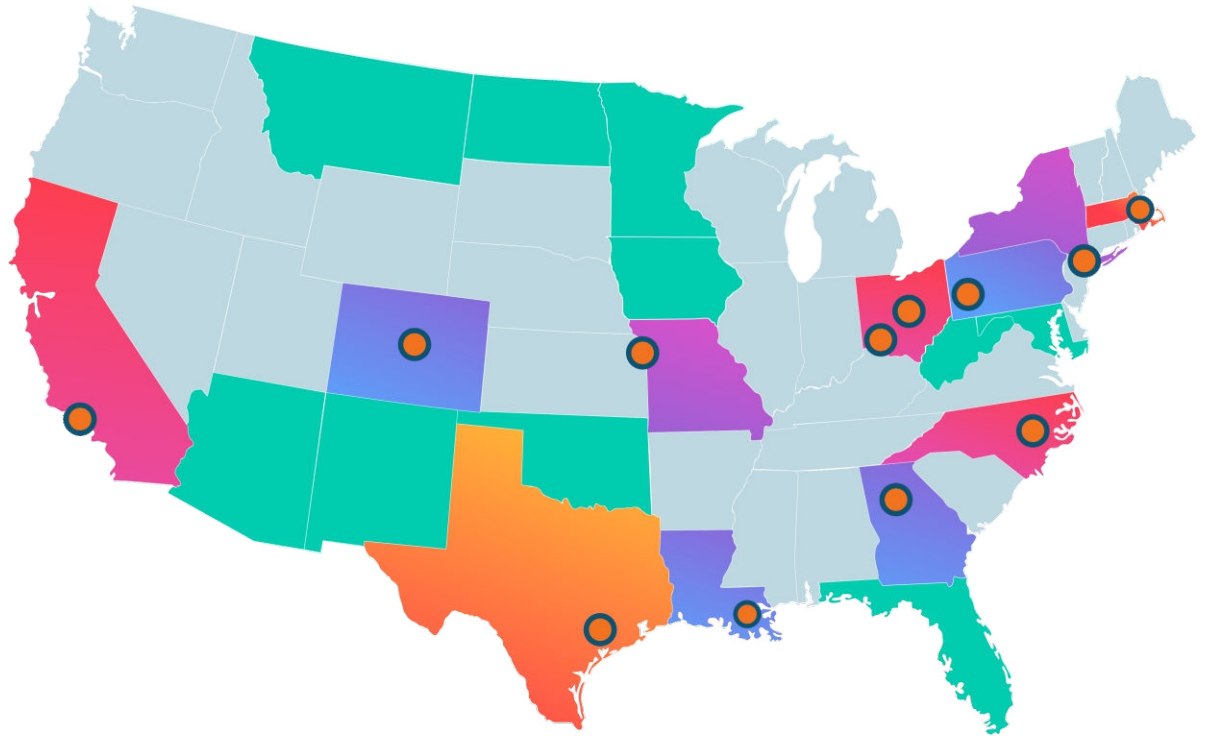
NEW SITES WERE
POWERED BY ABLEGAMERS

providing people with disabilities
a nearby location to assist in
setup to enter the world of gaming.

\$120,000

IN FUNDING AND EQUIPMENT
GRANTED TO POWERED BY
ABLEGAMERS SITES IN 2023

These organizations are
powered by AbleGamers through
initial and ongoing support and training
for staff and donations of specialized
controllers and other devices.



Partnering for Impact

Shepherd Center and the AbleGamers Charity partner to help people enjoy gaming after spinal cord and/or brain injury.

We were excited to announce a Powered by AbleGamers partnership with Shepherd Center in 2023. Shepherd Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia, specializes in medical treatment, research and rehabilitation for people with spinal cord injury, brain injury, multiple sclerosis, spine and chronic pain, and other neuromuscular conditions.

Research shows that people with disabilities are 51% more likely to be socially isolated than their non-disabled peers— a challenge that this partnership helps to address by making gaming more accessible to people after spinal cord and/or brain injuries.

AbleGamers provides Shepherd Center with initial training and ongoing support for staff along with assistive technologies, such as adaptive controllers or customized devices that help remove barriers to play. Specially trained therapists and rehabilitation engineers at Shepherd Center work with patients during their rehabilitation to test technologies and assess what they need to game. When the patient returns home from Shepherd Center, AbleGamers can often grant the customized equipment for personal use at no cost to the person.

“In 2022 AbleGamers’ Sr. Director of Peer Counseling, Dr. Andy Wu, began focusing on meeting players with disabilities where they are, and that set us on a path to find partners that understood the power that gaming brings to people,” said Mark Barlet, founder and executive director of AbleGamers. “You could not ask for a better partner than Shepherd Center, one of the top rehabilitation centers in the United States. Shepherd Center’s commitment to bringing AbleGamers’ mission into their work demonstrates the true value of the outcomes when we enable people with disabilities to have fun.”



“After my accident, I didn't think I would ever play video games again,” shared 14-year-old Carson. “AbleGamers Peer Counselors gave me great options and found the right equipment for me. Thank you, you have given me a hobby to enjoy again.”

Community & Inclusion

AbleGamers Get Together Gaming Sessions:

Our “Get Together Gaming Sessions” are digital and in-person events that bring players together, because gaming is even more fun when sharing the experience with others. In each of the communities we work with, we partner with some of the coolest destinations and empower our partners to host regular monthly game nights. Our Get Together Gaming Sessions connect players locally and allow them to meet new peers with similar lived experiences. Our team ensures that our players have awesome events filled with fun gaming, great snacks, and incredible giveaways from our partners in the gaming industry.

AbleGamers Player Digital Community:

The “AbleGamers Player Community Discord” consists of players with disabilities, AbleGamers Peer Counselors and Community Specialists, our partners in the game industry, and our partner facilities. We come together to celebrate games and give players the opportunity to meet new friends with shared lived experiences. As a community, we talk about games, host community game nights, and other opportunities that enable camaraderie in gaming all year round.

Bonus XP Events:

Our Bonus XP Events allow disabled players to attend gaming industry conventions and other events (like PAX and Dreamhack) through our unique Party System.

Our Party Leaders meet up with players and take them on an accessible, curated journey across the convention show floor, allowing them to meet and spend time with the developers who make their favorite games, the creators who make their favorite content, and other players who are playing alongside them in the gaming community. Our Party Leaders know that a party is better when the whole team is there, so they ensure that the players, their care teams,

and others they want to attend with can get passes to the event and join in the fun.

Without the party system, major conventions wouldn't be possible for some of the players we help, and your support helps us keep the party going. Look out for our Bonus XP Party Leaders at a convention near you soon!

Are you a developer who wants to help make a Bonus XP Event even more special? Contact us!



AbleGamers, Vincent Santore, interviews members of the Quadgods, an esports team and community for players with disabilities at Dreamhack in Atlanta.

Community Specialist Expertise:

AbleGamers Community Specialists strive to bring the fun and energy of gaming conventions to our local chapters and partners. Our team does this by connecting our decades of gaming knowledge and experience to our network of hospitals and partner facilities. This is done with an individualized approach that supports the needs of each player. We use initiatives such as our 1Up Project, which funds player's first games to play on their new gaming hardware, battle

passes, or other swag and opportunities to enable even more fun in a player's life. In Partnership with our Peer Counseling team, our Community Specialists work to create an onboarding process that welcomes our players and partners into the world of gaming. This is all achieved with guidance only AbleGamers can provide from our over 20 years of community-building and accessibility knowledge.



Brandon

"My biggest challenge was finding the right equipment to play video games. Now I can play video games with my kids and family again."



Courtney

"It's been so long since I was able to play. Thank you AbleGamers for the work you do. I think you are an amazing organization and really are making a difference in people's lives."



Christine

"If it wasn't for video games I wouldn't have met my best friend. I'm so happy to be able to play more independently thanks to AbleGamers help. It really means a lot to be able to continue doing what I love, and do it better than ever now!"



Jolee

14 year-old Jolee loves watching her sister play Minecraft but **she wants to play too**. Our Peer Counseling team got straight to work finding her the right gaming setup, and now Jolee is happily playing alongside her family!



Engineering Research

Hardware innovation is the lifeblood of adaptive gaming. The successor to the Freedom Wing controller, which allows users with power wheelchairs to control console games directly from their joystick, newer patents such as the "No Pull No Lift" controller, and engineering projects currently under NDA were given the green light thanks to our generous donors. These critical advancements in adaptive technology only exist today because of your support.

When we have a solution to build for players, the AbleGamers Center for Inclusive Play in Kearneysville, WV has a state-of-the-art maker space that includes 3D printers, laser, and electronics manufacturing facilities on site. We combine custom-built components with commercial products to create robust, individualized solutions that help get players past the initial barriers to play and into the game.



Sony Unveils Its First Accessible Controller in 2023

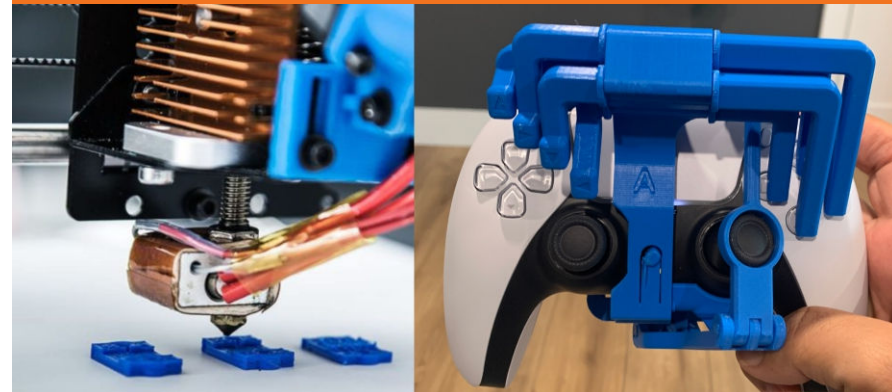
Designed to remove barriers to gaming and help players with disabilities play more easily, more comfortably and for longer periods on PS5.

We were beyond thrilled to have been part of this incredible journey with PlayStation to bring the new PlayStation Access Controller to life!

Our mission has always been to ensure that everyone can enjoy the magic of gaming regardless of their physical abilities. This project marks a significant milestone in that quest.



Kenneth wanted to play video games with his son, so our team 3D printed a snap-on attachment that would allow one-handed use of his controller. "Now I can play video games with my son. We are looking forward to playing Call of Duty together. Thank you AbleGamers!"



Professional Development

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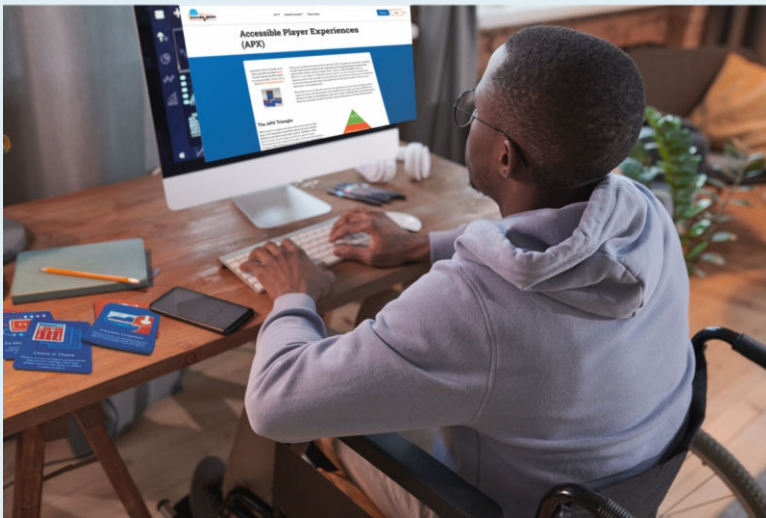
INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS TRAINED AND CERTIFIED IN APX (Accessible Player Experiences)

The 259 individuals trained in 2023 join the existing cohort of 372 trained and certified developers, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to make their games as accessible as possible to as many people as possible.

\$184,000

IN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

\$74,000 in scholarships were granted under our DPAD Initiative in 2023 adding to the \$110,000 awarded in the previous three years. Developers Promoting Accessibility & Diversity (DPAD) Initiative assists in cultivating a more inclusive gaming industry by granting marginalized developers (including developers who are disabled, people of color, women, and/or members of the LGBTQIA+ community), free access to the Accessible Player Experience Practitioner (APXP) Course



User Research

We are devoted to bringing the insights and experiences of individuals with disabilities into the game development process, offering a more holistic and inclusive perspective.

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PLAYERS WITH DISABILITIES PARTICIPATED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO GAMES

Player Panels is one of the world's largest groups of people with disabilities dedicated to lending their unique life experiences to create a more accessible world.

With over 400 players currently in the group, these players are paid to work with triple-A game studios, our indie friends, and more to add value in the creation of rich, accessible player experiences.



Accessible play starts here accessible.games

We provide services to studios (domestic and international) to help improve accessibility within their games for people with disabilities.

Through Accessible Player Experiences (APX), Research Services and Player Panels we help create accessible experiences for everyone.

Studios we have impacted:





Where We Are

AbleGamers is a 501c3 charity headquartered in West Virginia, **helping people with disabilities all over the world.**

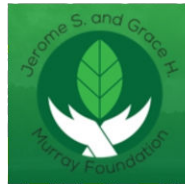
AbleGamers Canada, continues building relationships that help further our goal to make gaming as accessible as possible to as many people as possible so everyone can game. Our fantastic partnership with the Neil Squire Charity through their disability focused engineering non-profit Makers Making Change finds solutions for the barriers uncovered by our Peer Counseling team. Further, we have had a very productive relationship with the University of Prince Edward Island and its Faculty of Sustainable Design Engineering. Through the collaborative clinic projects, engineering students from first to final year have been working to create innovative adaptive controllers and accessories for gaming.

AbleGamers Brazil had a busy 2023. Our presence in Brazil has raised the profile of accessibility at various events, including an Accessibility at Xbox Booth at CCXP 2023, and a talk at the BIG Festival, which is the main event for the release and promotion of games in Latin America. A few opportunities that were presented in 2023 were the partnerships with Dell (Gaming Cap) and Power 4 Girls, an Undergraduate Thesis at the Mauá Institute of Technology and a Mortal Kombat 1 Release Event.



Partners

Thank you. Our community kept showing up when we needed them the most and we couldn't be more grateful. The incredible organizations below represent sponsorships and support of \$10,000 or more in 2023.



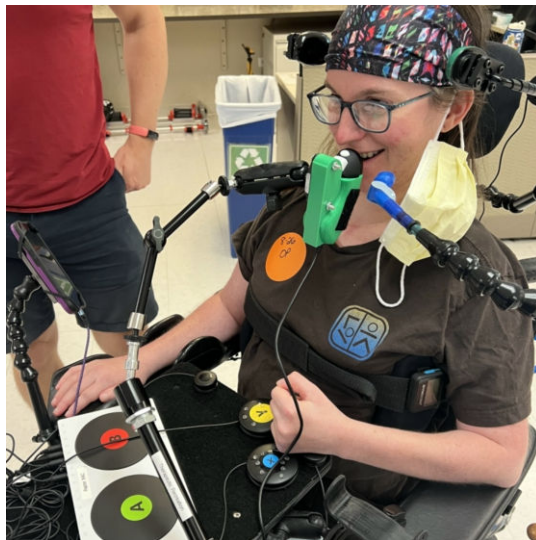
*We make every effort to ensure the accuracy of the donor list. If we missed your name please send an email message to giving@ablegamers.org so that we can correct the error. We also want to thank our many individual donors who we count on to support our work. We are deeply grateful for the generosity and invaluable support from all our donors, whose unwavering support fuels our mission to transform lives through the joy of play.



Thank you for supporting
our life changing work.
We can't do it without you.

Level Up

Level Up, our sustaining donor community, is a passionate and dedicated group of people on a mission to enable play and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.



Fundraisers

Gamers and content creators around the world have done some pretty amazing things to raise money to help make gaming more accessible for people with disabilities.



Our Donors

AbleGamers relies on the kindness and generosity of all our donors. You help us fund services and programs for people with disabilities and create change in the gaming community. Every dollar makes a difference, thank you all for supporting our mission.



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[AbleGamers.org](https://www.ablegamers.org)

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