



Case Study: Designing Games for Social Impact with Columbia University

OVERVIEW

Games for Change (G4C) partnered with **Columbia School of Social Work** and its HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Underrepresented Investigators (HISTP). The engagement began with a training workshop for scholars to learn about game design, followed by a game jam where professional game developers helped scholars create games about HIV prevention and intervention research. One winning scholar would receive \$15,000 from Columbia University to further develop their game.

PART ONE: WORKSHOP - APRIL 2020

This 2-day virtual workshop focused on how games can be utilized for HIV prevention and awareness, such as in addressing sex-education, promoting positive mental health, and in practicing healthy disclosures. Eight scholars participated in the G4C workshop, exploring how games can advance their HIV prevention research and support the diverse populations that they have been working with around the world, specifically in underrepresented black communities.

The workshop began with an overview of the social impact game sector and an exploration of case studies. Scholars learned about the G4C 8-Step Methodology for designing and publishing impact games, covering topics such as defining an audience, identifying context, securing funding, and evaluating impact goals via assessment. After the workshop, G4C provided feedback for each of the game ideas and strategies developed.

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

Scholars developed and shared their game proposals and received extensive feedback from G4C facilitators on how they could advance and move forward with their ideas. Five of the eight scholars chose to continue to develop their ideas with developers during the Game Jam in September 2020.

PART 2: GAME JAM - SEPTEMBER 2020

For this two-day game jam, professional game developers were paired with the scholars to build a working prototype of their idea. In advance of the game jam, the scholars were introduced to game developer partners and shared their game concept from the workshop. On the day of the game jam, developers helped the scholars refine their concepts and create “vertical slice” prototypes that could be used to experience the game’s mechanics, acquire funding, and proceed in development. G4C also met with each team to review progress milestones and support the development process.

GAME JAM OUTCOMES

At the end of the Game Jam, each game was pitched to a panel of expert judges with experience spanning game design, social impact, and NIH research funding. The judges were:

- **Brendon Trombley, BrainPOP**
- **Kimberly Hieftje, Yale Play2PREVENT Lab**
- **Dr. Maria Isabel Fernandez, Nova Southeastern University**

One scholar received \$15,000 from Columbia University to move forward with the game’s development and bring it to a stage where it could be tested with their target underrepresented communities.



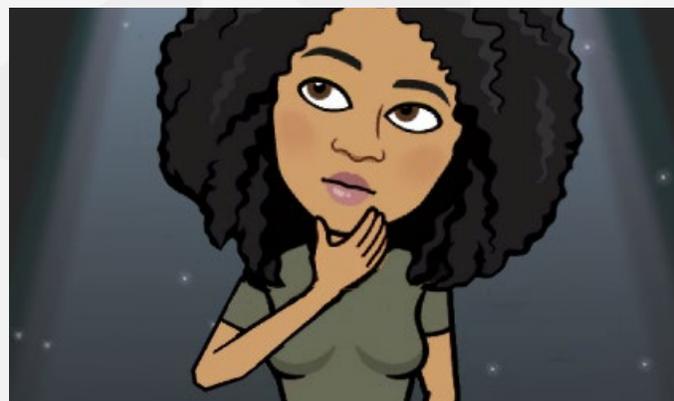
The winning game, *Change My Story* is an environmental novel about Obi, a 27 year-old with HIV struggling to disclose his HIV status to his girlfriend. Players explore Obi's home and make decisions that ultimately lead to whether or not he is able to successfully disclose. Obi's story is based on scholar Aimalohi Agnes Ahonkhai's real experience with her patients and research. The game will be paired with a mental health treatment program for 15-29 year olds living with HIV in West Africa, and will offer itself as an engaging teaching and reflection tool.



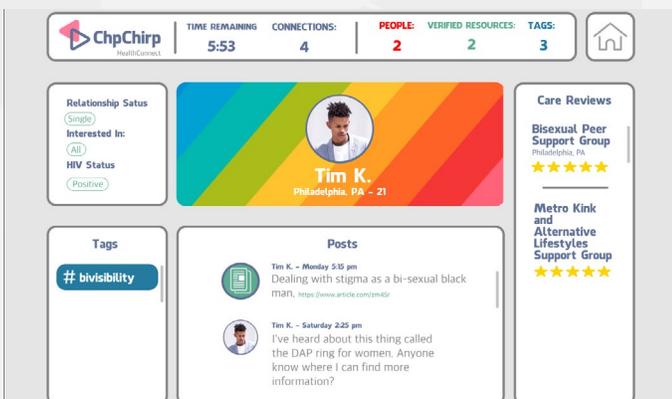
Some noteworthy runner-ups include...



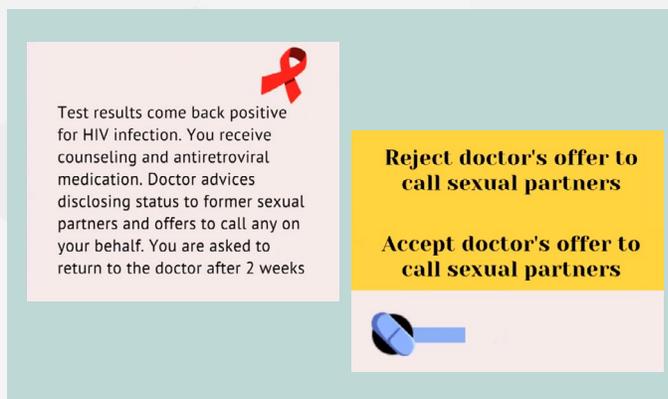
iREACH aims to help girls (15-24 years) self-inform, self-reflect, and self-manage their mental health and relationships. The game focuses on healthy relationships, rather than only safety decisions when at risk.



Pin Drop Quiz takes inspiration from Who Wants to Be A Millionaire? and challenges players to test their knowledge and start conversations related to HIV and other sexual health related topics.



ChpChirp (Health Connect) is a puzzle simulation game where the player must review social media profiles and connect users to articles, hashtags, care providers, and resources that help meet their health needs.



Dating Forward is a dating simulation game targeting African immigrant youth (18-26), allowing them to acquire and practice skills that reduce HIV-related stigma and increase engagement in HIV prevention activities.

FEEDBACK / SURVEY DATA

Feedback about the program was collected from surveys conducted after the workshop and game jam. While developers only responded to the game jam survey, scholars responded to both the workshop and game jam survey. The survey results showed nearly universal positive responses to participation in the workshop and game jam.

WORKSHOP SURVEY RESULTS ↗

- All scholars who responded to the survey were very likely to recommend Games for Change to a colleague or friend.
- 100% of scholars learned something new during the workshop and felt that it was a valuable use of their time.

What would you say to someone considering taking/funding/hosting a workshop like this?

“I would say that it is a really good workshop and worth their time. It provides you with the skills and opportunity to think beyond just an idea for a digital intervention.”

“Taking this workshop offers new information in a systematic manner. For funding, critical information provided is central to developing new strategies to address health behavior change or social change. Face-to-face/hands-on would be preferred but it actually worked out fine to do it virtually given that we were learning about use of technology.”

GAME JAM SURVEY RESULTS ↗

What is your biggest takeaway from the Game Jam?

“I’ve gained more appreciation for serious games and also appreciation for the work that the HISTP scholars are doing. The collaborative effort of people that come from different interests and backgrounds, coming together to make something is also amazing.”

“I can be a developer! My design experience and understanding of games is enough to build on and learn new skills, and what I can do already is enough to be valuable to a collaborator.”

“Creating a game for social change is an incredible way to reach out to our target groups in an innovative way.”

- 100% of responses thought that the Game Jam was a valuable experience and helped both scholars and developers think about their work in a new way.
- 100% of responders felt that this Game Jam effectively used the virtual platform, Zoom.

CONCLUSION

With the success of the Columbia University event with scholars in the HISTP program, Games for Change has continued to develop workshops and programs about how to design social impact games. Aima Ahonkhai continues to develop her game with Columbia University funding. In November 2020, Games for Change expanded on this successful format with a virtual serious games workshop and game jam for developers in Ukraine. Moving forward, Games for Change is well positioned to create personal impact game workshops and game jams in both virtual and in-person formats.