Nicole Reddington

**Henry interview draft 2**

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**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Gaming libraries high school tournament New Zealand sports people Henry esports consoles victory opportunity players world happening

**SPEAKERS**

1

Clare

Kia ora and welcome to the Library Stories podcast from Te Kete Wananga O Otautahi, Christchurch City libraries. This is a series in which we share some of our most impactful and interesting stories happening within libraries. I'm your host Clare and in today's episode, we're bringing you a conversation between one of our librarians Bridie, and the CEO of Victory Up, Henry Lawson. Following a recent staging of an eSports, League of Legends tournament at Turanga, Bridie, caught up with Henry to chat all things gaming, including his experiences growing up as a gamer, working with youth and his aspiration to break down the stigma associated with gaming as a sport. Listeners there may be gaming terminology in this episode you haven’t encountered before so don’t be surprised if I chime in at times to bring you up to speed. Now to the conversation between librarian Bridie and CEO of Victory Up, Henry Lawson.

2

Bridie

Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to found Victory Up? Because I understand that it was you, and I believe two other founders, who kind of came together to create this really cool organization?

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Henry

Yes. So we've been gamers since high school, which is way back in 2000. We, I guess, over the past five to eight years, we got really competitive in NBA2K on PlayStation.

 1

Clare

NBA2K is a series of basketball sports simulation video games. The premise of it is to emulate the sport of basketball, especially the National Basketball Association, the NBA

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Henry

And we found that there was no opportunities, no proving grounds for us to get out there and see how good we really were. (Right.) So, you know, it was always just a discussion over party chat while we were playing the game.

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Clare

Chatting with each other in the match, or in-game chat, is called party chat.

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Henry

We joined some Facebook tournaments that were being run by individuals toward a tournament, and they only ever seem to get so far before they failed. We would get to a playoff round and then the tournament would fall apart. You know, and then there’s the ones that would scam you. You’d be playing a match, all of a sudden, you've lost your $100 entry fee. You know, there's no prize money at the end. So we decided, let's just do something about it. Let's put some thought into actually creating an online platform where we can start hosting tournaments. (Yeah.) Build it from there.

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Bridie

And you've had such an incredible amount of success. It seems like, I know for me working in the, in the libraries, it's something that's super exciting for us to be able to have been a part of and also super exciting for the teens, the kids who are able to enter into the tournament's.

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Henry

Yeah, so like, esports isn't something new in New Zealand. It's been here. In the high school scene, it's been here for the past five years. Let's Play Live were the first to run a high school league, really successful. And then the year after we had another organization come in, which was I'm sure it’s Meta High School eSports. We also had Waikato University, or University Waikato, step into the high school scene. And when we purchased the licensing for Riot Games, we decided we wanted to change how it had been operated the last five years. Make it more encouraging to play in. In our first years. I guess, a national sports operation. (Yeah) it's just been amazing. (Yeah) the uptake has been awesome. The feedbacks been amazing.

2

Bridie

I feel like giving information is primarily the thing that helps to sort of destigmatize gaming, because I know that for some of the kids, especially from their parents, when we are hosting the tournaments in the library, they kind of are on their phones to their parents sort of explaining where they are, trying to get them to take it seriously; “Mom, dad, I can actually win something from this, I can actually gain something from this for my school.” So it's really cool to be able to assist and be a part of something that is kind of changing the way people look at gaming and being in a competitive environment, I think.

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Henry

Yeah, there's so many benefits to it, right? Sure, we don't have the physical side of it that you'd get from normal sports, which is I think, stops a lot of people seeing it as a sport. But everything else there, you know, strategic thinking, leadership, teamwork, sportsmanship, all of that sits within the core of eSports. (Yeah.) And there's a lot of rangatahi who miss out on that, because they don't play physical sports. Now, all of a sudden, they're exposed to that world, they've been recognized by their school. Okay, you can only be seeing something positive in that space.

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Bridie

Yeah, that sort of brings me into another thing I was very curious about which is, sort of, accessibility in gaming. Because gaming, you know, notoriously, I think, consoles are expensive, you know, having an internet connection, not everyone is able to have one. So you dedicate your time and energy to this awesome organization that's doing this incredible work, and then you might find roadblocks and that some kids might not be able to access. So I believe your solution, part of your solution with this was to get in touch with libraries.

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Henry

We were really lucky to be honest. We, libraries, we wanted to rehost another tournament, as they did last year, and obviously that put us together for permissions around using the right titles and getting access to a certain server, that it just grew from there of, “well we can actually make it more accessible. We can use this as a pilot to demonstrate around the rest of the country, on how we can make this more accessible.” And that also for us ahead, there's always a dual purpose behind everything. And if we're driving rangatahi back into the libraries to be used, it can only be more beneficial for the libraries.

2

Bridie

Yeah absolutely, it’s a symbiotic relationship for sure, we get, we get so much attention. It really, it really brings, it drives numbers, and it gets people to I think, look at libraries in a new light. It's more than just, you know, it's a building full of old books. (laughter)

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Henry

Yeah, the generational change definitely happened, right? You know, when I was at high school in the 2000s, you know, we still used libraries daily. We notice, you know, the growth of the internet sort of, we know that pushed people away, because you can just sit down at home and go, “oh, what do I need to research, what do I need to study? I can purchase this book or I can read this book without even leaving my house.” But there's still a lot of benefits you miss out on right, by not being at the library and that, that quiet zone. People are actually studying the same stuff. So it's cool to be able to push people back into that space.

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Bridie

Yeah, it's very cool, it really builds I think, a really powerful sense of community. And I think even just exposing young people to libraries, they bring their friends in, you know, I don't think there's anything more powerful than word of mouth when it comes to this kind of thing. But being able to boost gaming and use the social infrastructure of the library to do it, I think is incredibly cool. And I also think, incredibly special. I don't think there are many places on earth where people have been able to achieve the same results that we've been able to achieve with help from you. So I guess thank you, it's a big one. (laughter)

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Henry

It's definitely a two-way street. We, we wouldn't have been able to do it without you guys and libraries down there. And it's definitely opened the eyes of other organizations around the country. And, you know, for Victory Up, that's always been, our main goal is, we do not want to come in here and put on the big boy pants and stop everyone from being involved. (Yeah) We really want, you know the industry's young, the industry needs growth. So we work with other organizations around New Zealand to sort of open up spaces. So in Rotorua we work with Digital Natives Academy. (Wonderful.) So they have a digital hub that's targeted at rangatahi. So why not use them? We've got the same in Hawera, we’ve got a Digital Hub over there with the local iwi, and there's so many around the country that we could just be utilizing, and it’s just about giving examples and making those connections. (Yeah) and for us that's how, it's yeah, like you say it's another way we can battle the equity issue that we are facing. You know, if we look at our stats, Maori and Pacific Islander involvement this year was very low, very low for our own liking. (Oh, shame.) And but, you know, we have, I guess, plans in place on how do we achieve better numbers in that space? Being Maori, and Fred, who's the third co-founder of us, being Pacific Islander, we know that computers are out of reach, for our culture. Consoles aren't. Currently Playstations and PlayStation Fours and Xboxes aren’t out of reach. Because we've had a number of years to purchase them, you know, Playstation’s been around, PlayStation Four was 10 years before PlayStation Five came out. You know, so that's 10 years of a console you had a chance to get. (Yeah.) So we're looking at ways, okay, how can we incorporate more console games to sort of open up that space as well. So we were doing our best to try and identify other areas that we could work on.

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Bridie

That's incredibly important and sounds like something you're very passionate about as well, which is lovely to hear.

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Henry

Yes, I guess its, I've been quite lucky in my upbringing. I've always been exposed to computers. We've had people in our house that were studying at university and, you know, they were studying IT, coding. So there was always a computer around. (Yeah.) But you know, at the same time, they weren't, they weren't for gaming. (laughter)

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Bridie

But you've used them for gaming,

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Henry

I used it for gaming when no one was up. And you see it throughout the ages right, teaching changes. Teaching matches the situation that they're in. It’s the same with this. We notice that we get better results. You know, we run workshops on the side, we get better results communicating through Discord than we do with me standing in front of a group of students.

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Clare

Discord is an instant message app for gamers to communicate with each other.

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Bridie

Yeah, that makes, that makes a lot of sense. I think if kids are spending a lot of time at home using, using Discord, or Twitch or, sort of, any other platform to communicate with one another, and then they go into school, and they're forced to be face to face, which is valuable, I don't think you or I would say that's not valuable, but it's different. It's a different dynamic for sure.

1

Clare

Twitch is a streaming service that enables people to livestream to others. Especially to broadcast video games the streamers are playing to the audience.

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Henry

Kanohi to kanohi is very, when you’re living it daily, very easy face to face. When you're separated, as COVID has done to, to us these last couple of years. Even, even for myself normal engagements that were normal prior to the COVID became very, ‘oh, this is strange’. (laughter)

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Bridie

Coming back into the real world, like, there's something so precious about being able to be face to face. But you feel, it feels like a, it feels like a split I think. There's a split between being able to communicate, just casually. Just casually you don't have to look someone in the eye, I think for kids who maybe, have maybe been forced to feel anxious by an increased awareness and maybe mental health in New Zealand, as well as, just as you said before, the evolving society, the evolving times of, you know, being so technology based.

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Henry

Yeah. And it's just finding the positives in everything, right? It's very easy to find negatives. And I could find a dozen negatives of face to face. (laughter)

You know, we need to be concentrating on those positives, what can we do? What's the good we can do with this space? And there's so much, there's so much untapped potential within this space. And we're not going to hit it all at Victory Up, we're only going to hit a sliver of it.

2

Bridie

But worth it, which is why it's so incredibly precious and why I was so excited to be able to talk to you about it as well.

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Henry

Yeah, it's that competitive scene. It’s that intensity within the room is you know, absolutely crazy. The emotional roller coaster that they go through, that you witness. For the finals that we had this year, you know, we sat within the voice chat and a lot of it was a part of our policies; making sure that online communication is safe. And we were sitting within those. And the ups and downs that these players experienced throughout the whole finals was just unreal. (Yeah.) But the coping mechanisms that they had built for themselves and as a team to pull themselves out of ruts, that was even better to listen to. They're a lot more resilient than we think. (Yeah.) Gaming's helping with it. (Yeah, I think so too.) And I think it's where, you know, people talk around “it’s just a game”. For a lot of these students it's not, it's the rugby or the netball on a Saturday. (Absolutely.) And the difference is you know, when we play physical sports we're playing once a week, so we're only going to lose or win once a week. When I'm playing eSports man, I could lose 10 times a week. (laughter) Before I even win. Or win, yeah, or win. We’ve definitely got a lot of, you know, we watch a lot of content creators and streamers who actually play on overseas servers from New Zealand. (Yeah.) With Delay, so with heavy ping, high ping, who, you know, they're amazing, they're winning on those sort of handicaps. (Yeah.)

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Clare

Ping describes how fast a data signal travels between a users computer and a server. Low ping is great for gaming. Ping is measured in milliseconds.

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Henry

And for us, and that's one of the drivers, we’re major on here in Victory Up is, imagine seeing our people on an even playing field. (Yeah. That’d be wicked.) What's that gonna look like on the world stage? And we already know it with our professional sports teams, you know, in traditional sense. (Yeah.) We can, we can play with the rest of the world.

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Bridie

We can go toe to toe, we just need the, we just need a shot. Right?

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Henry

Yeah, correct. And that's all we're trying to build, is that shot, that solid foundation. (Yeah.) You know, you have a solid high school ground of sports, you know, that’s a feeding ground into a professional realm. (Absolutely.) And it gives you an opportunity to sort of, at the same time, get it out of your system. (Yeah.) We live in the age of ‘I want to be a YouTuber, want to be a tick tocker, (absolutely) want to be a content creator’. If you get a shot at it, you know, I guess as a “that's what I want to do in the future”. All of a sudden you realize actually, don't like it. Don’t want to be a content creator. It’s a lot of work! (laughter)

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Bridie

I think sometimes people don't realize quite how much work something like that is. Even being like an Instagram influencer, YouTuber, Twitch streamer, the amount of time investment and passion you need to funnel into it. It's the same as any other creative pursuit. The self-motivation you need, I think is the sort of thing that gaming teaches. So, we know that there's been a league tournament that finished I was involved with helping to host at the libraries which was really cool. I understand that you've got Valorant. You're getting ready to host a Valorant tournament, is that right?

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Henry

Oh so, with the high school league, we had four game titles running in tandem. They were on different days. Tuesday was Valorant, Wednesday was League of Legends, Thursday was Rocket League. And that was happening all over the country.

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Clare

League of Legends is a strategy game with multiple players facing their opponents in an online battle arena where each player controls a character who has a special set of skills.

Valorant is a shooter game in a shooter universe with a five-person shooter team. With such different characteristics the two don’t really mix.

Rocket League, developed by Psyonix is like soccer with cars where you work as a team

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Bridie

Ah, that’s, I didn't know you guys had Rocket League. Is that only for high schoolers. (laughter)

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Henry

15:58

So we, every game title that we offer in the high school league and in the tertiary space, we are including that on our public space as well. (Oh, excellent.) So which, which we are working on releasing very soon. (That's so cool. That's so exciting). But we really wanted to get the sort of grassroots scene going first, especially in the high schools.

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Bridie

16:21

Yep, I'm aware, just from my own personal interest that there is a lot of money in gaming, especially overseas, even just to do with things like sponsorships. And it'd be super cool. Some of the futures of these kids who are involved in that kind of thing, being able to tap into that resource. It's, I mean it's a whole financial bracket that I don't think New Zealand has tapped into and it's, there's a lot, there's a lot there to work with.

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Henry

16:47

We are well behind. (Yeah.) Even in our game development side of it, you know, we're very far behind. Now it's a billion dollar industry, we haven't even cracked, you know, half a mill. And once we start getting that government support, and you know, once they see it as that opportunity for New Zealand, they can get their support. It's just gonna go gangbusters. (Gang busters?) Yeah, (let's go) got that from, from my old boss. (laughter)

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Bridie

17:20

Gangbusters, let’s go with that. I haven’t heard that before. I like that a lot. Yeah, any big plans for 2022.

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Henry

17:27

For us, we really want to dip into the reasons themselves and actually help solidify them and make them you know, I guess local sponsorship within that space. (Yes, that sounds awesome.) This year we had national sponsorship, that gave coverage over the whole of the tournament. We're still in discussions with the team about this. But we really believe that by sort of regionalised sponsorship, gives an opportunity for the growth to happen a lot more organically within that space. And then coming over the top with a sort of overall national sponsor may work a bit better to encourage growth. We want to start seeing more schools stream in broadcast. We still have our broadcast that we want to do but be great to get some more schools involved, sort of going putting their hands up saying’ hey, we want to stream the game’, so Victory Up can highlight them. (Yeah.) Because it's, because there's just that opportunity to learn there, it's just so fresh and new, (that’s wicked) that we just want to get behind it.

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Bridie

18:29

Ah, it's so exciting, it's wicked. Thank you so much Henry. I really, really appreciate it

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Henry

18:34

No worries, nah, I appreciate you taking the time to actually talk to me so it’s cool.

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Clare

18:39

Kia ora ano, it's me again. Thanks for listening to this episode of the library stories podcast. I hope the conversation between Bridie and Henry has provided you with some insight into the wondrous world of gaming. Keep an eye out for future eSports tournaments at the library and check out the Victory Up website for ways you can get involved, if you're curious. That's all for this episode, thanks for listening. In the meantime, you can find more episodes of the library stories podcast on our website, Christchurch City libraries.com and most podcast platforms. Until our next episode, ka kite ano

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