

PLAY TO CONNECT:

YOUNG GAMERS ON WHAT IT TAKES *TO THRIVE ONLINE*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PROJECT ROCKIT and Roblox would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which this workshop took place, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise the ongoing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country, Culture, and Community.

We also acknowledge the young people who contributed their time, ideas, and lived experiences to this work. Your voices are at the heart of this report.

We extend our thanks to PROJECT ROCKIT's National Youth Collective, whose members supported facilitation, documentation, and reflection throughout the process, as well as the contributors who helped shape and strengthen this report. In particular, we acknowledge Lamisa Shah, member of the National Youth Collective, who served as Lead Youth Editor on this report, providing critical review, editing, and refinement of the final content.



IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ADULTS IN THE ROOM TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO GROW IN; NOW WE MUST ASK YOUNG PEOPLE TO HELP US MAKE THAT SPACE THE BEST PLACE FOR THEM.

- LAMISA, LEAD YOUTH EDITOR

▶ INTRODUCTION

From the early days of arcade machines and consoles, through to expansive multiplayer worlds, gaming has evolved into one of the most powerful cultural and social spaces of our time.

Whether it's dodging pixelated ghosts in Pac-Man, jumping over barrels with Mario, building limitless worlds in Minecraft, or connecting with millions of others across platforms like Roblox and beyond, gaming has always been more than just a form of play. It has been about imagination, challenge, identity, and connection.

For many young people today, gaming is not a separate activity, rather it is a core part of how they socialise, learn, and express themselves. It is where friendships are formed, challenges are overcome, and shared experiences are built.

RHYS

17 YEARS OLD



*Living in regional Australia all my life, I've found that gaming has allowed me to **meet new people**. In rural areas, your options for friends are limited. Whenever I play, I invite some friends to chat, and it almost feels like a **remedy for loneliness**, as it makes me feel like like-minded people are just a game away.*

NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

EMILY

18 YEARS OLD



*Historically, as a neurodiverse young person, the main way I was able to emotionally regulate and/or socialise was through video games – where I could **explore the world safely**.*

NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

At its best, gaming can foster:

- ⌚ Deep social connection and belonging
- ⌚ Collaboration, teamwork, and communication
- ⌚ Creativity and self-expression
- ⌚ Persistence, resilience, and mastery

These are not incidental outcomes, rather they are protective factors that support young people's wellbeing and development.

At the same time, like all online spaces, gaming environments may present young people with significant challenges like:

- ⌚ Bullying, toxicity, and exclusion
- ⌚ Unwanted or unsafe interactions with others
- ⌚ Systems that incentivise excessive spending or create inequity
- ⌚ Frustration linked to time, progression, or unclear design
- ⌚ Experiences that undermine fairness, safety, or trust

These realities matter, and they require thoughtful, proactive responses.

Meanwhile a growing body of research and practice – including frameworks such as the *Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children (RITEC)* and the *Thriving in Games Playbook* – highlights that reducing harm alone is not enough. Instead, there is a critical opportunity to design digital environments that actively strengthen positive behaviours, build social and emotional skills, empower young people with agency and voice, and foster connection, inclusion, and wellbeing.

In other words, environments that support young people not just to be safe – *but to thrive*.

LAMISA



*Play is such an integral part of **how young minds develop**. It helps us understand social connection and builds our capabilities, independence and confidence. We should be fostering and supporting this in a way that allows all young people to **feel included**.*

LEAD YOUTH EDITOR

This report captures the insights, experiences, and ideas of 40 young people aged 10–14 who participated in a creative consultation exploring civility and safety on Roblox.

Through play-based activities, discussion, and rapid prototyping, young people shared what matters most to them, what challenges they face, and what they believe would make gaming environments safer, fairer, and more enjoyable.

Their message is clear:

The future of gaming is not just about better technology.

It is about better experiences – designed *with*, not just *for*, young people.

What young people consistently told us is that what matters most in gaming isn't just the game itself – ***“what matters to me is my friends and teammates because they always help me in games,”*** it's ***“friendship inside games,”*** or ***“playing with my friends”*** and ***“what matters is that if other people get bullied I usually want to help.”***

In other words, what matters most is the people they play with, and how they show up for each other. Throughout this report, we have intentionally centred the *direct and unfiltered* voices of young people. As the lived experience experts of these spaces, their perspectives are not supplementary – they are the foundation of this work.

Across this initiative, these themes came up again and again. Young people spoke about friendship, support, and standing up for others as central to their experience of gaming.

This aligns with a growing body of evidence that prosocial behaviours such as cooperation, helping others, positive communication, and shared problem-solving play an important role in shaping safer and more positive online environments. Digital play can support young people in developing a range of competencies, including a sense of agency, emotional regulation, social connection, and mastery.

Research from [UNICEF Innocenti](#) shows that well-designed digital environments can help young people experience control and choice, build confidence through achievement, regulate emotions, connect with others, and express themselves.

[Further research](#) on digital resilience also suggests that these kinds of competencies matter. When young people are able to cope with challenges, recover from setbacks, and navigate difficult experiences, they are better able to manage the ups and downs of online spaces. In this way, developing these skills doesn't just support wellbeing – it can actually help young people avoid and deal with online harms.

Taken together, these findings point to a simple but powerful idea:

If we want safer gaming environments, we need to support young people to build the skills and experiences that *help them thrive* within them. That's what this report is ultimately about.



Why are PROJECT ROCKIT and Roblox working together?

This partnership brings together two important perspectives.

PROJECT ROCKIT

PROJECT ROCKIT is Australia's youth-driven movement against (cyber) bullying, supporting young people to show up for each other, speak up against hate, and lead safer, more inclusive communities. Our focus is on the social side of online safety: the behaviours, relationships, and cultures that shape how young people experience the spaces they're in.

ROBLOX

Roblox is a platform where millions of young people come together every day to play, create, and connect. Like all online environments, it presents both opportunities and challenges, and works continuously to strengthen safety, fairness, and positive experiences for its users.

This work reflects a broader commitment to bringing together youth voices and industry action. It is not about endorsement or critique of any single game or platform, but about collaboration, and ensuring that the lived experiences of young people directly inform the design of safer, more positive digital environments. By working together, we are able to pair grassroots insight with platform-level expertise, and help turn young people's perspectives into tangible improvements in how these spaces are designed and experienced.



What was the purpose of the workshop?

This workshop brought together young people in Australia (ages 8-14), their parents and caregivers, PROJECT ROCKIT facilitators and Trust and Safety leaders at Roblox. Together, we're interested in exploring – how can design and cultivate social, peer-based gaming environments where young people can not only stay safe, but also thrive?

The process was designed to:

- ⊗ Centre young people's lived experience
- ⊗ Enable co-design rather than consultation
- ⊗ Foster shared understanding across sectors
- ⊗ Generate practical, design-informed ideas



▶ OUR APPROACH

While this report focuses on insights from the youth co-design workshop, it forms part of a broader, multi-stakeholder engagement designed to capture perspectives across the online safety ecosystem.

The youth workshop used a co-design methodology grounded in play and participation. This was complemented by parallel engagements with parents and expert stakeholders, recognising that creating safer and more positive gaming environments requires input from multiple perspectives.

Insights from the expert stakeholder consultation were led by Professor Amanda Third, Co-Director of the *Young and Resilient Research Centre* at Western Sydney University and are explored in a separate discussion paper. The paper, *Building Connection*, can be found [here](#).

Young people engaged in:

- ⌚ Game prototyping
- ⌚ Creative storytelling
- ⌚ Group-based design challenges
- ⌚ Reflective discussion

This allowed participants to express:

- ⌚ Their experiences
- ⌚ Their frustrations
- ⌚ Their ideas for improvement
- ⌚ Their aspirations for better games

In parallel, expert stakeholders engaged in:

- ⌚ Systems thinking discussions
- ⌚ Industry and policy analysis
- ⌚ Socio-ecological modelling
- ⌚ Exploration of future possibilities

This ensured:

- ⌚ Multiple perspectives were represented
- ⌚ Ideas were grounded in both lived experience and technical feasibility
- ⌚ A shared language was developed across groups



**YOUNG PEOPLE ARE
THE BEST TELLERS
OF THEIR OWN
EXPERIENCES;
*IT IS UP TO US, THE
ADULTS, TO LET
THEM BE HEARD.***

– LAMISA, LEAD YOUTH EDITOR

How did we recruit young gamers?

We recruited participants through PROJECT ROCKIT's existing networks in Australia, including partner schools, social media channels (Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn), the National Youth Collective, and broader youth and community networks.

The workshop brought together 40 young people aged 8–14, with an average age of 11.6 years, and included a mix of genders (65% male, 26% female, 9% non-binary), backgrounds, experiences, and identities.

As reflected throughout the photography and participant contributions in this report, the group was intentionally diverse, including many neurodivergent young people and young people from a wide range of cultural and community backgrounds.

While we collected some demographic information through parent and carer registration forms, we have chosen not to present a detailed demographic breakdown here. Because participants were young and many forms were completed by adults from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, we do not believe the data fully or accurately reflects how young people themselves identify.

Instead, we have focused on creating an inclusive and accessible participation process that enabled a broad range of young people to contribute meaningfully to the workshop and the ideas captured throughout this report.

YOUNG PEOPLE

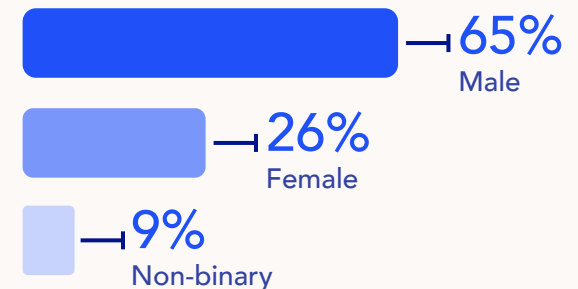
40

AGED

8–14

AVERAGE AGE

11.6



How did we support young people to participate?

To support participants ahead of the workshop, a social script (or social story) was created and shared with families prior to the event. Social scripts are a tool commonly used to help neurodivergent young people understand what to expect in new or unfamiliar environments by walking through a sequence of events, settings, and interactions in a clear and predictable way. In this context, it helped participants prepare for arrival, participation, and transitions throughout the day, supporting reduced anxiety and greater confidence to engage fully in the workshop.

The workshop was designed with strong facilitation and wellbeing support in place. Each table was guided through small group facilitation, with PROJECT ROCKIT presenters acting as youth facilitators and members of the National Youth Collective (aged 15–21) supporting as notetakers. A dedicated social work lead and sensory space were also available to ensure participant wellbeing throughout the day.

This approach meant young people were not only participants, but also played an active role in leading and shaping the workshop experience.

ADI, 16 YRS



*The overall experience was something I had never experienced before, in a good way! **Every single kid there felt listened to.** A lot of kids play Roblox, but a lot of them never feel like they can have a real impact with their feedback. Traditional “surveys” feel like a classroom exercise rather than something genuinely useful (and I can 100% vouch for that from personal experience), so the whole structure of the day, from talking in our individual tables, to us, the facilitators helping collate and synthesise the findings after the event, **felt like we were part of something bigger.***

NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE



What activities did we do?

To guide the design of the workshop, we drew on the [Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children \(RITEC\) framework](#).

RITEC identifies the key conditions that support children's wellbeing in digital environments, including autonomy, competence, emotional wellbeing, relationships, creativity, identity, inclusion, and safety. Rather than focusing *solely* on reducing harm, it provides a practical lens for designing experiences that actively help young people thrive.



Across the day, young people engaged in a series of fast-paced, creative, and play-based activities designed to surface their experiences and ideas. These included storytelling, drawing, group discussion, and collaborative challenges that explored what makes games fun, what makes them feel unsafe or unfair, and how games could better support positive behaviours and connections.

A central activity invited participants to step into the role of game designers through a rapid prototyping process. As we framed it:

“We are now game developers. We are going to prototype games to make them better, safer, more fun, and more friendly. We don’t need to code. Many people who design games don’t code – they generate ideas, and ways that games work and how people will interact. That is what we are doing today.”

Working in small groups, young people selected games they already loved and redesigned them using creative materials. They introduced new features to promote teamwork, support fair play, reduce negative experiences, and strengthen connection between players. They also identified elements that should be removed to make games feel safer and more inclusive. This process generated a set of youth-designed game concepts grounded in real experience by offering practical, imaginative, and deeply informed ideas for how digital play can better support thriving.







WHAT WE LEARNED

Young people were clear about one thing from the outset: as the primary users of gaming environments, their voices should not just be heard, but actively included in the decisions that shape these spaces.

"When older generations think they know what young people want, without even asking, it's like a waiter already bringing out a steak before you even look at the menu"

– **ADI, 16 YEARS OLD**
NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Firstly, they were clear that safety is non-negotiable in gaming spaces. They described experiences of toxicity, bullying, violence and aggression, cheating, scams, and unsafe or inappropriate interactions with other players as real challenges that shape how and whether they play.

These are realities that many young people navigate in spaces where they may not always have the support of trusted adults. This echoes what we consistently hear through PROJECT ROCKIT's school programs, where students also describe these experiences as widespread in their everyday online lives. At the same time, their insights did not stop at safety.

Across every activity, young people also articulated what positive gaming environments feel like. These were spaces where they could build friendships, experience joy, develop skills, express identity, and feel a sense of belonging and achievement.

This tells a story with two clear threads

1. Young people want gaming environments that are safe, fair, and free from harm.
2. They also want environments that actively help them connect, grow, and thrive.

In other words, safety is the foundation, but it is not the full picture of what young people value.

LAMISA



*It is **everyone's responsibility** to make a space safe. To achieve that, it is the responsibility of adults to **enable young people to build the capacity** to create a safe space for themselves and their peers. Teaching young people how to interact with others in communities is one of the first steps to achieving this.*

LEAD YOUTH EDITOR

Their experiences show that when games support social connection, emotional enjoyment, autonomy, and mastery, they are not only more engaging, but also feel more meaningful and positive. This points to an opportunity for game design that goes beyond harm prevention towards prosocial, developmental, and wellbeing-supportive experiences.



THERE ARE ALL THESE RULES TO KEEP US SAFE IN THE REAL WORLD, *BUT THEY ARE NOT THE SAME TYPE OF RULES THAT KEEP US SAFE ONLINE.* ADULTS OFTEN MAKE SAFETY AN AFTER THOUGHT WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY, AND IT SHOULD BE PART OF THE INITIAL DESIGN *AND NOT JUST UP TO US TO WORK IT OUT.*

– DARCY, 15 YEARS OLD, NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

The RITEC framework highlights eight dimensions of children’s wellbeing in digital environments. Young people’s experiences in this consultation strongly reflected each of these dimensions in their own language.

RITEC dimension	What young people told us
Relationships	Gaming spaces are fundamentally relational, with young people reflecting on the importance of “playing with friends no matter whether you win or lose” and “what matters to me is my friends and teammates because they always help me in games.” Across the board, their perspectives highlight that social connection is the primary driver of play.
Competence	Young people are motivated by progress, challenge, and the feeling of getting better over time. This shows up in moments like “finally winning rivals after losing heaps,” or “working to get good,” and “there was a boss that was really challenging to defeat, but I kept trying to defeat it and I did.” However, this sense of achievement depends on fairness, with frustration “when players use money to win” and a desire for “better anti-cheat” mechanisms. Young people also expressed a desire for games that actively support skill development and fair progression, such as “have milestones and quests that people have to complete as a team before playing properly.”
Autonomy	Young people spoke to the importance of choice and control in how they experience games, including the ability to shape settings and content. They wanted to “turn off scary aspects by choice (like day/night mode)” and “make games customisable. Say, you are going to add blood or death to your game, let the players decide if they want that and give them more freedom to decide what they want.” They also highlighted how autonomy can be disrupted by gameplay mechanics that interfere rather than enable, like “when I keep getting tagged when I am trying to say hi to a friend.”
Emotions	Young people described gaming as a space where they experience and navigate a wide range of emotions. This includes moments of happiness, with one group simply describing the experience of their favourite game as “joy,” alongside the importance of enjoyment (“it is important to have fun and more especially have fun together with the people you like”). At the same time, they spoke about frustration (“when things take too long to grow, I get impatient”) and loneliness or boredom (“when there are no friends to play with”). These reflections show how gaming environments evoke diverse emotional experiences, and highlight the importance of supporting young people to move through these moments during play.



RITEC dimension	What young people told us
Identities	Games provide a space for young people to express and explore who they are, particularly through avatars and in-game roles. Experiences like “playing with my best friends and making funny avatars” and “playing with friends and all their avatars” highlight the importance of self-expression, while frustrations such as “when I try and find good hair for free - they are so bad” show how limited options can impact how young people represent themselves.
Creativity	Young people highlighted the importance of being able to create, customise, and shape game experiences. This is reflected in experiences like “playing Dress to Impress,” where design and expression are central to gameplay. Creativity also emerged strongly in their ideas for how games could be improved, including “customise enemy appearance” and “add good ideas, add your own game name, and do a great effort,” showing a desire not only to personalise their own experience, but to actively shape the design and world of the games they play.
Diversity, equity and inclusion	Young people were highly attuned to fairness and how people treat each other in games, describing break downs as “when people on your server are toxic and don’t be kind.” They also raised concerns about inequity, including “when the games are fun and there aren’t players that use money to win” and “make cheaper prices because people get bullied for having no robux,” highlighting how financial barriers and pay-to-win dynamics can exclude players. These insights reinforce that inclusive design must support both respectful behaviour and fair access.
Safety and security	Young people were explicit about the importance of feeling safe in gaming environments. They raised concerns about “hackers or exploiters” and “seeing other people bullied and when you go to report them, they leave the game.” They also articulated clear expectations around moderation: “please fix moderation” and “there are bad grown ups... ban ‘em.” These experiences highlight the need for strong, visible, and responsive safety measures, including effective moderation, anti-cheat systems, and reporting tools that work in real time. For young people, safety is not assumed, rather it is something they expect to see actively upheld within the game.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU'D ADD TO MAKE A GAME IN ROBLOX MORE FRIENDLY?

WRITE AND ADD A POST-IT

No more
public VC

If somebody types
in inappropriate
words they get
kicked out of
the server

If somebody is hacking
the game, you can
ban them from the
game.

Designing better games

In one activity, young people were asked to think like game designers and respond to the prompt:

“How could a game be designed to help players?”

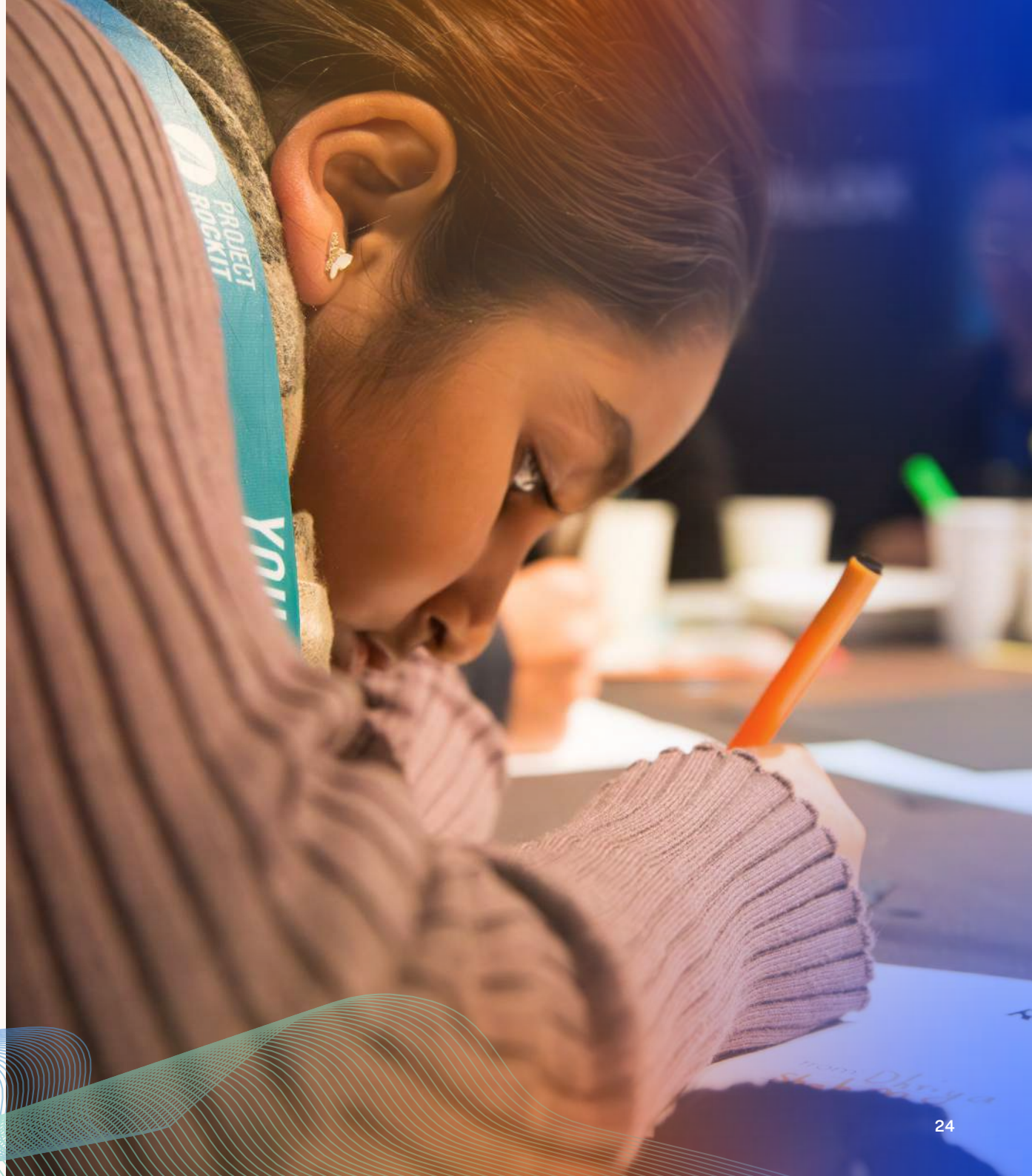
Their ideas moved beyond critique into highly creative system-level suggestions for how games could actively support better player experiences.

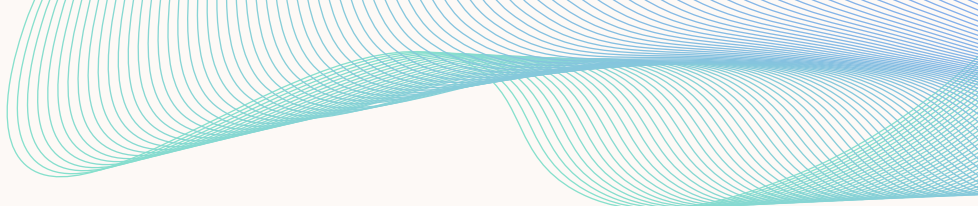
How could a game be designed to help players...

Work together and cooperate?	Stop fights and arguments?	Learn how to play the game?	Stand up for another player?	Praise other players?	Correct cheating?
<i>“Make it so you need two or more players to achieve the goal”</i>	<i>“Filter words and kick people out if they use that word”</i>	<i>“Interactive tutorials guided by AI”</i>	<i>“Allow to send anonymous upstanding messages”</i>	<i>“make a treasure chest of compliments where you tell people you’ve done well”</i>	<i>“Have relevant penalties”</i>
<i>“Two player cooperation mechanics that promote teamwork”</i>	<i>“Update reporting and offer more diversity in types of bullying people do”</i>	<i>“Have NPCs [non-player characters] in game that give instruction and praise good play”</i>	<i>“Opposite of reporting – a behavior system – like for uber drivers”</i>	<i>“Tributes given to good players by developers”</i>	<i>“Ask ‘is it necessary to cheat’”</i>
<i>“Allow teammates in games where you die to revive you”</i>	<i>“Promote actions where you work together, not against”</i>	<i>“Create ways for experienced players to help new players, and reward them for doing it”</i>	<i>“Create a reputation system in game where you can gift people points for being nice”</i>	<i>“‘well played’ button”</i>	<i>“Better anti-cheat, freeze players for 10 seconds who break a rule and warn them”</i>

Across all six areas, young people consistently designed system-level interventions, where they focused on game mechanics, learning structures, and platform features rather than individual behaviour alone. This reflects their sophisticated understanding of how design shapes player experience.

Young people were not only able to identify problems within gaming spaces, they were also able to articulate thoughtful, creative, and practical ideas for how those spaces could work better. Their responses demonstrated a strong awareness of the relationship between platform design, player behaviour, and community culture.





Lamisa Shah, a member of PROJECT ROCKIT's National Youth Collective and Lead Youth Editor for this report, offers a reflection on what these findings reveal about gaming spaces and the role they play in young people's lives.



Third spaces are a crucial aspect for development for young people, and as these spaces have become more and more limited as time goes on, the emerging digital world has become this third space, with platforms such as Roblox filling that gap.

Within these spaces, young people learn to be themselves, testing the water, seeing what they like, and finding their voice. Young people use their game avatar as an extension of themselves. Many use it as an opportunity to explore their own identities, be it gender orientation, expression of hobbies or personal style. These spaces not only allow young people to express themselves, but have also become a place of accessibility for young people who may not be able-bodied or are geographically restricted from accessing social environments.

Within this exploration, there are times when young people will engage with antisocial behaviour. But I believe young people know these behaviours are not correct and have and will adapt and grow with experience. For example, some young women choose not to use voice chat in first-person shooter games due to experiences of toxicity and gender-based aggression. At the same time, young people also actively respond to these dynamics by promoting more positive behaviours.

For instance, when games such as “99 Days in the Forest” were trending on Roblox, social media communities created content encouraging players to be better teammates.

Roblox is inherently collaborative, with interaction built into almost all games across the platform. Whole genres are built around shared participation, such as the two-player obbies [obstacle course games], trade-based games and competition-based games, such as ‘Dress to Impress,’ all of which rely on players working together for the game to function. In these community-driven worlds, the quality of interaction between players becomes central to the experience, which really highlights how important it is to support positive and respectful participation.

This report highlights that young people are able to identify both strengths and shortcomings of the platforms they use, and can actually help to come up with great solutions. This is their space, and they know what needs to be done to fix it. And young people are responsive to this – when games are designed to centre positive and meaningful experiences, those values are reflected and reinforced in how young people engage with them.

▶ KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The young people participating in this project didn't just describe problems – they actively generated ideas for how games could help them to thrive. These takeaways capture what they are already showing us about the future of gaming.

01: BUILD FOR CONNECTION

"Play should bring us together"

The best games aren't just played together – they're built that way! Young people want core mechanics that require teamwork, shared goals, and connection, not just optional multiplayer features.

02. EMBED SAFETY BY DESIGN, NOT REACTION

"Safety should be part of the game from the start"

Safety needs to be part of how games actually work, not something added after harm appears. Young people called for systems that prevent issues early and reduce exposure to bullying, scams, and inappropriate, aggressive or sexualised behaviour from other users.

03. LET GAMERS SHAPE THE CULTURE

"How we play shapes what the game becomes"

Young people don't just play games... they shape how those games are experienced as they play. They want systems that support positive behaviour, peer encouragement, reputation, and ways to reward good play, not just report bad behaviour.



04. PUT PLAYERS IN CONTROL OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

“I want to be able to control how I experience the game”

From settings to interactions, young people want real control over how they play so they can make games feel safer, calmer, and more their own.

05. MAKE FAIRNESS PART OF THE GAME

“Fairness is something you can feel”

We were told by young people: Fairness isn't theoretical, you can actually feel it (or not) in the way games reward players. Young people pushed back against pay-to-win systems and wanted clear rules, visible progression, and strong protections against cheating.

06. TEACH PLAYERS AS THEY PLAY

“Games should help me learn while I'm playing”

Rather than assuming existing skills, great games support young people to develop mastery as they go. Young people called for learning to be built into gameplay itself, through tutorials, prompts, and in-game support that help players learn rules, skills, and expectations as they play.

07. CELEBRATE POSITIVE PLAY

“Being a good teammate should actually count”

Recognition in the moment really does matter. Young people told us that they want kindness, teamwork, and helpful behaviour to be visible and rewarded in gameplay, so positive actions actually shape how the game grows, not just how it is moderated.



**YOUNG PEOPLE ARE
NOT JUST ASKING
FOR BETTER GAMES,
THEY ARE ALREADY
SHOWING US WHAT
THEY LOOK LIKE.**



1. There is only one goal.
2. Tutorial mode/Easy mode.
3. Modes!!
(Auto drive?)



ROBLOX

PLAY TO CONNECT

A 'digital thriving' workshop with young gamers

ROBLOX



PROJECT
ROKIT



PROJECT
ROKIT

ROBLOX

