

NEW STATEWIDE PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP - THE KARES COMMUNITY SEEKS TO ENGAGE SENIORS THROUGH VIRTUAL GAMING & ESPORTS

BRYN MAWR, PA, US, May 26, 2020
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Social isolation and loneliness among older adults is one of the most serious health issues



facing our country today. Combatting that problem is the goal of a new public-private partnership – the K.A.R.E.S. Community (Keystone Athletics, Recreation and Esports) – which will use virtual technology to bring Pennsylvania seniors together for Esports and electronic gaming fun.

KARES' partners include its founder, health technology and innovation consultancy, EnableHealth; the PA Esports Coalition; Pittsburgh's Jewish Healthcare Foundation; Geisinger Musculoskeletal Institute; Athletes for Care; RTI International; the KNGDM Group; the PA Office of Rural Health and the Keystone State Games, among others. The partnership is looking to pilot its first virtual activities at the next Keystone Games, re-scheduled now for October 2020.

Partnership leaders note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is nearly impossible for seniors, especially in rural areas, to congregate. Technology and virtual gatherings, however, have made it possible for older adults to remain engaged and maintain social connections. The objectives of this initiative are to leverage technology to enable seniors to participate virtually in friendly competitive sports and games in a fun and healthy environment.

About 28 percent of older adults in the United States, or 13.8 million people, live alone, and in a 2018 survey of 20,000 participants conducted by Cigna, nearly half (46%) of those surveyed reported that they felt alone sometimes or always. Perhaps no other age group feels the keen sting of loneliness more than seniors -- a condition only exacerbated by COVID-19. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) agrees, adding that loneliness can also have clinical consequences. Research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death.

Conversely, according to the NIH, people who engage in meaningful, productive activities with

others tend to live longer, boost their mood, and have a sense of purpose. These activities seem to help maintain their well-being and may improve cognitive function.

The Initiative is currently identifying potential projects and partners from across PA, and has the support of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, which recently published the results of a statewide survey. The survey was conducted by the Pennsylvania Council on Aging and sought to assess how older adults have been managing through the current pandemic. The survey reported that more than 25% of the 3,700 respondents said they would like to take advantage of virtual gaming if given the opportunity.

“Older Pennsylvanians enjoy sports, games and other ways to socialize and congregate for fun and fitness,” said Pennsylvania Secretary of Aging, Robert Torres, “I applaud the work of KARES, which seeks to safely and positively engage our senior community through the pioneering application of Esports and virtual gaming. I’m particularly encouraged by their initial project which seeks to expand recreational opportunities for older adults through a partnership with the Keystone State Senior Games.”

Founded in 1983, the non-profit Keystone State Games, Inc. is a public/private partnership that has attracted over 500,000 participants of various age groups to their events, which provide a statewide, multi-sport program with an Olympic format to encourage and assist in preparing Pennsylvania’s athletes to enter national and international competitions.

“The Keystone Games are excited to be the first in the country to introduce a virtual element to senior games,” said longtime Executive Director, Jim Costello. “We will be looking to begin gradually by introducing a handful of online games for participants in our upcoming Fall Games and Expo, and then look to launch our first-ever virtual Winter Games in 2021, leveraging several Esports applications.” Concluding, Costello added “and it’s fitting we launch this new initiative in May, which is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month!”

“The Pennsylvania Esports Coalition is also excited to work with the other partners on this initiative to bring the inherently social nature of Esports to a demographic that will no doubt benefit from the entertainment and technology the industry brings,” said Bill Thomas, Chairman of the Coalition. “The current COVID-19 pandemic has shown that we need to do a better job of addressing isolation in our older adult population, and we believe strongly that Esports and competitive video gaming can be a significant part of the solution.”

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation, a nearly 30-year-old organization based in Pittsburgh, has been committed to reducing isolation and loneliness among seniors since its founding. Over the last several years, it has focused on the application of technology to increase connection and engagement among older adults in Western Pennsylvania. “We have always been committed to keeping seniors safe and well and this includes keeping them engaged and connected with their communities,” said Mara Leff, Director of Innovation at the Jewish Healthcare Foundation. “We think Esports is a fantastic outlet to foster this type of connection, and we are thrilled to be

partnering to make it a reality.”

“Geisinger has a long history of supporting the Keystone Games,” said Dr. Michael Suk, head of orthopedics at Geisinger and a clinical leader in Esports. “This year we’re excited to help the games make the transition to a virtual environment, including the introduction of an online platform for health & fitness, a first for senior games in the country.”

“RTI International is thrilled to partner with KARES to offer its researchers and expertise to help combat senior isolation in new and effective, innovative ways,” said Jamie Pina, PhD, MSPH, Director, Applied Health Informatics Program.

“We commend Mark Stevens and his team at EnableHealth for bringing instrumental partners together to find creative solutions to address the health and fitness needs of seniors in these unprecedented times. Our team of more than 200 elite athletes are honored to be part of this important initiative,” said Anna Valent, Executive Director, Athletes for CARE.

“EnableHealth is proud to bring such an amazing group of individuals and organizations together for such timely and important work,” said EnableHealth Managing Director, Mark Stevens. “We’re grateful to Secretary Torres for his vision and support, and to Jim Costello for allowing us to make history while launching the Initiative’s first project together at this year’s Keystone games!”

About EnableHealth:

EnableHealth is a global professional services firm whose vision and mission are to create and sustain an innovative global healthcare ecosystem by accelerating the growth of transformative healthcare initiatives worldwide and enabling entrepreneurs to more quickly and effectively bring to market disruptive health technologies and business process solutions which increase quality while lowering costs. For more information, please visit www.GoEnableHealth.com

About the Pennsylvania Esports Coalition:

The Pennsylvania Esports Coalition is a non-profit 501(c)(6) organization created to advance the development, growth and integrity of Esports in Pennsylvania through advocacy, education and promotion of the industry. The Coalition is comprised of stakeholders from all aspects of the Esports industry, including technology, entertainment, education, athletic, casino gaming and government sectors. For more information, please visit www.paesports.org

About the Jewish Healthcare Foundation:

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation is an activist and grant-making foundation with three operating arms: the Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative (PRHI), Health Careers Futures (HCF), and the Women's Health Activist Movement Global (WHAMglobal). It offers a unique brand of

activist philanthropy to advance healthcare innovation, advocacy, collaboration, and education in the interest of better population health. For more information, please visit www.jhf.org

About Athletes for CARE:

Athletes for CARE (A4C) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization launched in 2016 by passionate professional athletes who recognized the need to advocate for the health, safety and wellness of the more than 2 billion people of all ages who compete annually in sanctioned sports globally. Through that advocacy, we are improving health and wellness options for the billions of people around the world living with mental and physical illnesses including chronic pain, depression, anxiety, PTSD, CTE, TBI, substance abuse and opioid dependency. For more information, please visit www.athletesforcare.org

About RTI International:

RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Our vision is to address the world's most critical problems with science-based solutions in pursuit of a better future. Clients rely on us to answer questions that demand an objective and multidisciplinary approach—one that integrates expertise across the social and laboratory sciences, engineering, and international development. For more information, please visit www.rti.org

About KNGDM Group:

Using the power of perspective, purpose, and passion for uplifting communities, our mission is to build a network of investors, supporters, developers, and influencers that care about social justice. Founded by NFL veteran, Derrick Morgan, KNGDM Impact Fund exists to amplify individual disconnected efforts into a collective vehicle at-scale, creating more opportunities to improve economic conditions of the disadvantaged. For more information, please visit www.kngdmgroup.com/

About the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health:

The Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH) is one of the 50 state offices of rural health. PORH is a partnership between the United States Federal Government, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania State University. PORH is charged with being a source of coordination, technical assistance, and networking; partnership development; and assisting in the recruitment and retention of health care providers. For more information, please visit www.porh.psu.edu/

About the Keystone Games:

The mission of the Keystone State Games is to promote physical fitness, sports activity, and

sportsmanship as a health improvement and disease prevention strategy for all Pennsylvanians and other participants and to create an expanded, coordinated and citizen-sponsored program of amateur athletic competition. For more information, please visit www.keystonegames.org

About the K.A.R.E.S. Community:

The K.A.R.E.S. Community is a national online network of members of all ages that communicate and participate with one another in a variety of social and recreational activities. The mission of K.A.R.E.S. is to help individuals, especially seniors, stay connected while combatting isolation during times of social distancing. The K.A.R.E.S. Community's focus is on the whole individual's wellness – physical, mental, emotional and social. Members will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities online, as well as in person, once social distancing guidelines are lessened. The key to the K.A.R.E.S. Community is that we will never be apart again. We are in this together, and together we will stay active, stay healthy, and stay connected! For more information, please visit www.karescommunity.org

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