

# Formation and Other eSports Activities for Disabled Persons in Gunma Prefecture

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## 1. Why use eSports in social services for disabled persons?

There is increasing awareness of eSports as a new genre of activity for disabled persons being sponsored by many local governments. Disabled-person eSports has become topical as a form of barrier-free sports that enables people be on the stage as players, regardless of having a disability. eSports tournaments and championships are currently attracting the attention of disability-related facilities at a national level.

Our company first began noticing the potential of eSports for disabled persons and initiated our eSports business in the winter of 2018.

We wanted to give the people with disabilities, who were coming to a facility every day, a chance to have hopes and dreams, so we created a facility for life nursing care with an environment that enables them to set their sights on becoming eSports professionals. No similar facilities existed at the time and we had many applicants, so it was clear there was much demand in the field. For the facility, we contracted with a pro team and prepared a fully-equipped training environment, but there were still many challenges for the players.

## 2. Types of devices for disabled persons

Every person operates devices differently, even when considering the same type of disability, so finding out how a user will operate a device can be a challenge. The market for such devices is also still small in Japan, so only a limited number of devices can be sold.

Consider the example of Mr. Koshizuka, with whom we have a pro contract. Due to muscular dystrophy, Mr. Koshizuka has difficulty with ordinary controllers and plays using parts of his body from the neck upward. The first game-play method Mr. Koshizuka tried was using line-of-sight as a mouse pointer. However, this quickly became tiring and it was difficult to play for longer periods of time.

The second device we tried was a mouth-operated mouse called a Quad Stick (Figure 1). With this device, mouse operations are done using the mouth, click operations can be done by breathing in or out, and button operations can be optionally configured. Mr. Koshizuka was able to do operations reliably, even when playing intensely, so we decided to build a device for him based on the Quad Stick (Figure 2).

Besides these, he uses ten other devices such as touch-activated

■ Figure 1: Mouth mouse



■ Figure 2: Mr. Koshizuka's devices



buttons, buttons that can be pushed using your cheek, and buttons that attach to the finger tips. He currently uses these devices to play League of Legends.

## 3. Disabled person eSports for promotional purposes

Mr. Koshizuka was able to play the game using the devices in this example, but that may not be the case for other users. Devices must be built suited to each person. Many types of devices are also needed to build device configurations for each person, and much more activity in the device market is needed to produce the devices for these configurations. Having eSports for disabled persons will help to build this market.

We have engaged in activities to gather disabled competitors nationally and raise awareness of eSports for disabled people.

As the next step in this activity, we worked to expand activities nation-wide and in 2019 we held the first eSports Tournament for disabled persons in Japan. All participants were players with disabilities. We had a capacity for 20 participants, but when we began recruiting, we received more than expected—almost 30 applications! This gave us a strong impression that it was a big step toward the future.

For the 2019 disabled-person eSports tournament, we provided coaching to players before the tournament, so that even beginners could participate easily. We also included various other aspects into the tournament for people with no knowledge or prior interest in eSports, to promote their interest.

Then, as the tournament day approached, we also held events to make sports culture in Gunma prefecture more interesting and attract them to the event, such as having a parasports area, and holding eSports tournaments for disabled persons and the general public.

However, there were still significant issues to resolve, since there had never been an eSports tournament that enabled disabled people to play to their own satisfaction. For example, the slope to the stage was not designed with proper consideration for wheelchairs, or the desks could not be adjusted for the heights of wheelchairs, which differ for each person. There were many other issues that do not need to be considered at other eSports tournaments, such as people who tend to panic under harsh lighting, how to contact participants that are hard of hearing, and how to accommodate people requiring meal management or other types of care.

■ **Figure 3: Disabled person eSports tournament winning team**



By providing these improvements, we believe that disabled-person eSports can enable disabled persons to have hopes and dreams, and stand up on the stage. The first tournament in Japan, in 2019, created a strong reaction in various media and the event

really showed how it could grow (Figure 3).

#### 4. Start of the Onegame business

As soon as the tournament finished, we took feedback from it and started a business for the next step. We really felt that the tournament had been a place where disabled persons were able to take action, so as our next task we set out to create a training space, so that disabled people could set their sights on reaching that place.

We spent one year to complete the Onegame office, and it opened in July, 2020. We received many inquiries, from within and outside of Gunma prefecture and it became popular with our users. For training, we had professionals from the training industry to create video materials, and participants learned by watching them.

Having only oral or written guidance can be difficult to understand, so we provided support suited to individuals' disabilities, and we found that some of our enrollees were able to learn extremely quickly.

Many participants did not feel comfortable with regular social services for disabled people, and many were interested in becoming eSports pros, so we also provide training in business manners and skills, to help them find work through eSports.

At the time it was a very new experiment and we had difficulty working with the public administration and game companies, but now the reputation of the program has improved considerably and we have almost reached our capacity of participants.

#### 5. Regional establishment of Onegame and franchising

We wanted Onegame to develop associated with the region, so we worked to create an overall eSports facility suited to the region. For example, in Ota City there are eSports departments in both the Gunma prefecture offices and the municipal offices, and the administrations are putting effort into eSports, so our Onegame efforts helped to increase interest in eSports in people and to build excitement in the region.

Other efforts included an event with SEGA, the developer of "Puyo Puyo eSports," and collaboration with UBISOFT, the developer of "Rainbow Six Siege," which provided about 1000 T-shirts commemorating the tournament. The tournament seemed to raise the level of excitement for eSports in the whole gaming industry.

Several photographs from our Onegame efforts are included here. Figure 4 is from an event held at Onegame in April 2021, using Puyo Puyo. This was the first event planned in which we had people competing in the facility from both the Gunma Prefecture and the Ota City eSports Clubs.

We were able to hold an event very closely tied to the region, using the whole facility, with people enrolled in the MC course providing commentary and play-by-play for Puyo Puyo and acting as master-of-ceremonies for the event, people enrolled in the

event course handling relations with the various companies and operating the event, and people enrolled in the player course, dealing with competitors, eSports clubs and the competition.

Even though conditions are still bad due to COVID-19, we are preparing an environment that allow us to hold events for members of the public, as we do for disabled persons.

Onegame provides a place that disabled persons can go to communicate with their local region and be involved in activities that enliven the region through eSports.

With the Onegame business we are also offering franchises. By franchising, people from throughout Japan will be able to come to a place that previously only existed in Gunma Prefecture, and there will be more opportunities to learn in areas that were not possible earlier, with Type-B continuous work support. We decided to franchise Onegame to provide suitable learning environments and to expand eSports activity.

After we started Onegame, we have seen many facilities throughout the country adopting eSports. However, there really were no facilities with learning environments suited to disabled people. Among the people who inquired at Onegame, there were people who had been going to other facilities providing eSports, but the staff at those facilities did not provide any support, and only provided an environment where games could be played freely. Most of these facilities were providing eSports without permission from the game companies, while Onegame certainly obtains

permission and also provides support.

In addition to playing games, we also provide an educational environment that enables people to communicate and have contact with people from outside, through eSports. By having richer communication and contact with people from outside, users can increase their confidence and become more positive about gaining employment. Thus, eSports training at Onegame provides education that has value for people, regardless of disability.

This type of training, available throughout Japan only at Onegame, also provides support suitable for those looking for work, through eSports.

We also hope to build an eSports economy with our franchises, so that disabled people interested in eSports work can learn at Onegame in each region, help to build up the region through Onegame, and thus promote hiring of disabled people.

After we have increased the number of franchise branches, we have a vision for other activities only possible in Japan, such as planning a para-eSports pro league and creating a disabled-person eSports tournament brand.

We want to make progress each day, to enable even one disabled person find a job or make progress toward their dream through eSports education.

These activities also represent what we want to give back to all of those who have enjoyed and supported Onegame.

Onegame will set up the basics for franchises, and will provide

■ Figure 4: From the left: Gunma Prefecture agency eSports Club, Ota City eSports department



support for building them to owners after that.

The goal of ONELIFE Co. Ltd. is to be an education business providing training for people's dreams, so with each new franchise branch, we hope to establish Onegame in a new form.

## 6. Gunma eSports Association

On a slightly different topic, we also have activities to expand eSports to a wider range of people. The Gunma eSports Association is the first eSports organization in Gunma Prefecture. The association promotes eSports in Gunma, increasing the population engaging in eSports, and creates enjoyable spaces for children using PCs and other devices to build interest in IT.

One of our activities to expand eSports was in Ota City in Gunma Prefecture. We held an eSports tournament in collaboration with a hot-springs resort called Yurabu and an internet café called Zima (Figure 5). The event was also intended as tourism PR for Ota City, so prizes for the tournament included items such as admission to the Yurabu hot-springs resort. This was so that visitors to the event would also see the allure of the hot-springs. The tournament attracted many participants, including children and adults, and was quite lively.

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has required more restrictions, but even during the pandemic, we have been looking for opportunities for activities with players.

Post COVID-19, many individual shops had closed due

to the drop in sales during the pandemic, so we are planning eSports events to invigorate towns that have lost energy during the pandemic.

Onegame is working with the Gunma eSports Association, consulting with everyone in the Ota City eSports department regarding the event, including tourism PR. We have set a goal of making Ota City in Gunma Prefecture a community enlivened by eSports in 2022.

Finally, we will introduce initiatives involving disability, eSports and medical treatment. Some people still believe that eSports can lead to gaming addiction. As such, we plan to conduct a survey this year in collaboration with Gunma University, regarding what benefits eSports could have for disabled persons.

With eSports, players must use their heads to think and hands to control a keyboard or mouse when they play, so we expect that it could have effects such as rehabilitating brain function or training hands or feet. In preliminary experiments for this research, we attached instruments to a player's head while playing a game and gained valuable data showing large changes in activity in the frontal lobe of the brain. As this research progresses, we may find that eSports can be applied to rehabilitate a wide range of disabilities, such as dementia in the elderly, or for physical rehabilitation.

We will continue activities to raise awareness of eSports, to further expand their potential.

■ Figure 5: Yurabu tournament

