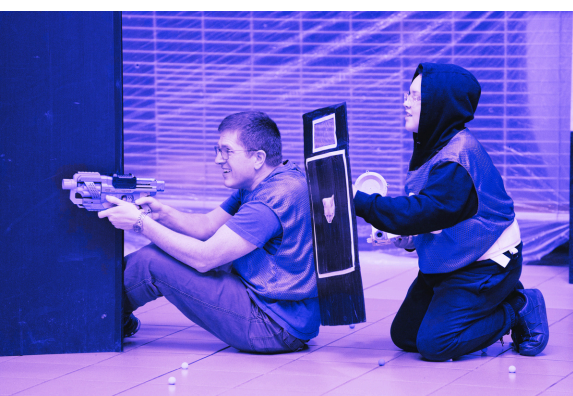


# IMPACT REPORT

## Mall Blaster Battle Violence Prevention Program



**For**

**COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION**  
of Snohomish County

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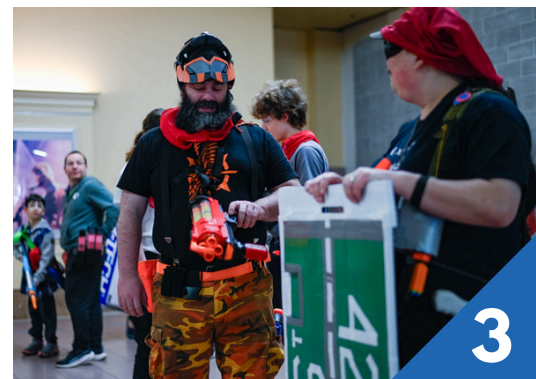


# INTRODUCTION

## ***HUMAN BEINGS ARE AN INTERDEPENDENT, SOCIAL SPECIES***

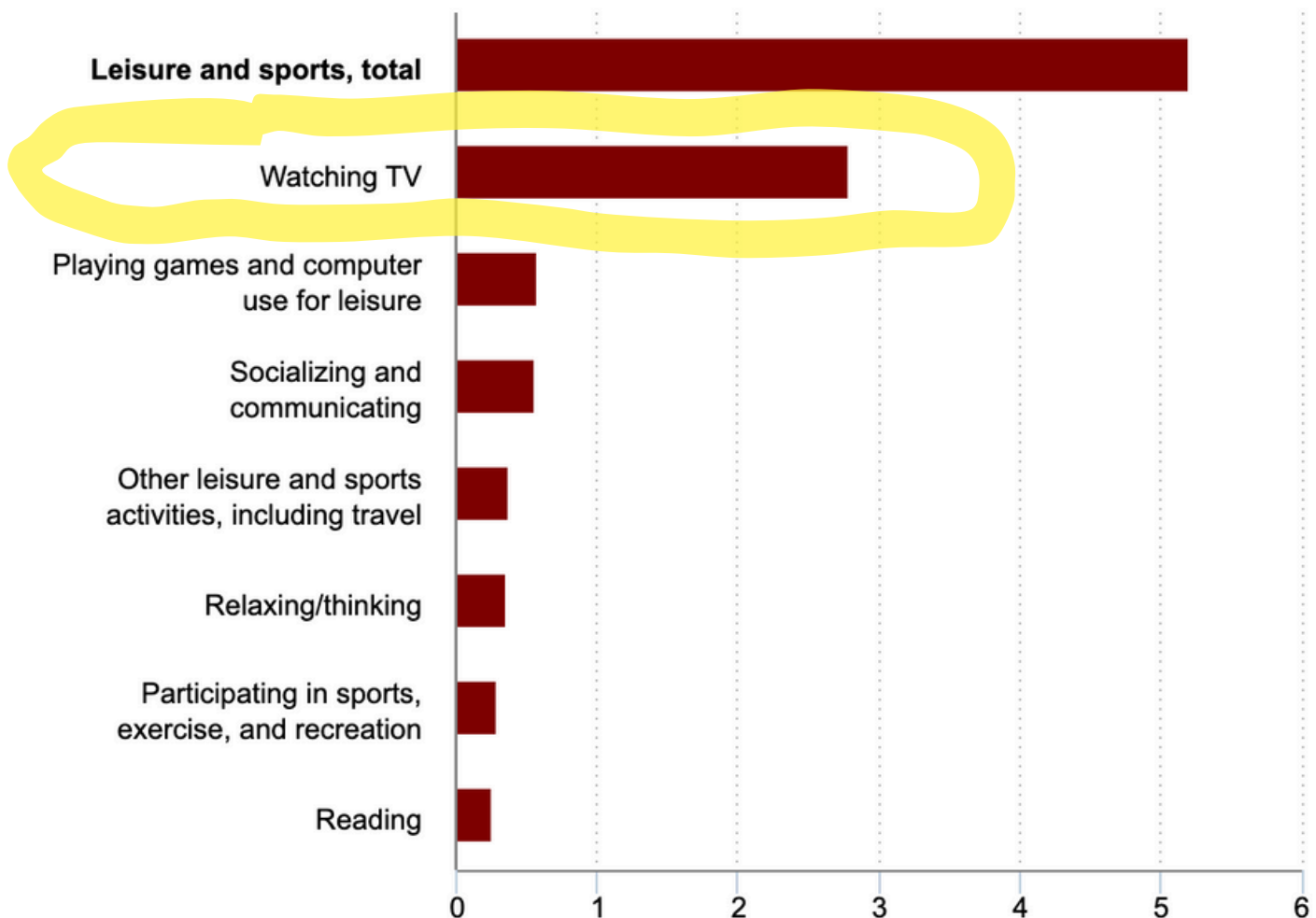
Social connection—the structure, function, and quality of our relationships with others—is a critical and under-appreciated contributor to community health, well-being and sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

A lack of social connection poses a significant risk for individual health and longevity. Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively.<sup>2</sup> Lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>3</sup> Poor or insufficient social connection is associated with increased risk of disease, including a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.<sup>4</sup> It is associated with increased risk for anxiety, depression and dementia.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the lack of social connection may increase susceptibility to viruses and respiratory illness.<sup>6</sup>



# AND YET IN THE U.S., WE SPEND MOST OF OUR FREE TIME . . .

Average hours per day spent in leisure and sports activities, all days of week, 2022 annual averages



Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, The Economics Daily, Time spent in leisure and sports activities, 2022 at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2023/time-spent-in-leisure-and-sports-activities-2022.htm> (visited September 27, 2024).





# THE PROGRAM

From November 2024 through April 2025, Planet Mynd delivered a series of indoor nerf blaster battles. It entered into an event rental agreement with owners of the Everett Mall to rent its 7,600 sq ft event space for the monthly events.

The program was open to the public, ages 8 & Up. Attendees were invited to bring their own nerf-style blasters. To encourage broad community participation, Planet Mynd provided a variety of free loaner dart blasters, as well as community darts, eye protection, face masks, and water.

The organization initially launched the series by forming a coalition of organizations providing financial and in-kind sponsorship. Change the Narrative, Everett Pride, and XFoxGames provided financial sponsorship. Out of Darts, Mighty Shrub, Everett Royals, This Coffee Life, Silver Fox Industries, P3G, Captain Xavier and Everett Comics provided in-kind donations of play equipment, volunteers, and various services.

The grant awarded by the Community Foundation of Snohomish County in January 2025 allowed for Planet Mynd to deliver a program with additional features.

- Dedicated, experienced game moderators who were given a small stipend for moderating.
- Loaner blasters adapted and modified to simplify operation and improve performance.
- A contract Program Coordinator working full-time on marketing, administration, operations, logistics, staff coordination, volunteer recruitment, equipment modification, and supply procurement tasks for each blaster battle.
- An enrollment system for organizations in Snohomish County serving youth to offer the blaster battles as a free play program.
- When the Everett Mall was no longer available for April 2025, to rent alternative spaces the First Baptist Church Community Center and the Everett Boys and Girls Club.



# PROGRAM RESULTS



The Mall Blaster Battle program was well-attended by a mix of communities inside and outside Snohomish County (for a detailed breakdown, see p. 7).

Additionally, three organizations enrolled in the program for free play.

- Casino Road Kids Ministries, which brought 3 youth to the March Mall Blaster Battle;
- Village on Casino Road, which brought 9 community members (4 adults and 5 minors) to the April Blaster Battle.
- Everett Police Department provided the Mall Blaster Battle program as a referral program for School Safety Officers to consider for any youth encountered that, in their judgment, would benefit.



The Mall Blaster Battle Program delivered four tangible, lasting benefits to Snohomish County.

1. It improved health by fostering social connection among people who feel left out of other activities.
2. It leveraged play's ability to teach behavior through the use of intergenerational play.
3. It engaged the community in active, immersive and non-violent activity.
4. It fostered community based on expression, creativity, and ingenuity.





# MALL BLASTER BATTLE PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS

**8**

**Day-Long play  
events in 6 Months**

**504**

**Total Attendance**

**150**

**Unique Players**

**39.10%**

**Players Under Age 18**

**37.3%**

**Players Ages 18-35**

**23.6%**

**Players Over Age 35**



**"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."**

**– Maya Angelou**

## **BENEFIT #1**

**The Program improved health by fostering social connection among people left out of other activities.**

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITY FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION



Research has confirmed the detrimental effects of a lack of exercise on mental health.<sup>7</sup>



Loneliness, the subjective perception of social isolation, has been found to be especially detrimental to mental and physical health.<sup>8</sup>



Fortunately, a recent study has shown that participating in an active activity with others can have a much larger effect on loneliness than a passive activity.



In fact, the study results indicated that the active activity had a large impact on loneliness even when the people were just acquaintances.<sup>9</sup>



Moreover, whether an activity was active or passive had a LARGER effect on loneliness than whether the activity involved people of similar race, age, gender or sexual orientation.<sup>10</sup>

**Active activity = Joint engagement in an activity.**







"I didn't really have many people to play with growing up, but I just always liked the blasters themselves . . . eventually I found this place and I'm coming here and getting to do mods and stuff."

**Dawson Yurth, Age 22**

"I have never seen a community more accepting than the nerf community."

**Richard Chambliss, Age 49**

"The organizer was very friendly and accommodating, and the community was incredibly welcoming."

**Ferew Belewe, Age 18**

"My favorite thing about nerf is that . . . [i]t's good for folks like me who have a lot of energy but maybe are not so interested in established, organized sports to go . . . and get some exercise."

**Nick Price, 26**

"My favorite thing about nerf I would say is the social aspect . . . I've always really loved having a team of friends that I play with. When I go to games I go to play with my friend group not specifically to play the game . . . It's been a long time of making new friends."

**Russell Verduzco, Age 22**





“In between rounds I like to challenge people to duels. Awesome.”

**Cary, Age 12**

“I really enjoy hanging out with friends and bringing together the technical side of the hobby with a fun play field and a ton of awesome people.”

**Fox, Age 21**

“I play nerf because it’s one of the few things (I have a physical health issue), so this isn’t something that’s super taxing on me. It gets me involved with other people as well. Nerf has probably one of the most welcoming communities that I’ve ever been in and it’s nice having a place where you feel like you belong so that’s why I play nerf.”

**Tabitha Vanpevenage, Age 28**

“What I appreciate most is the diverse community that gathers here. You’ll find people from all walks of life, different ages, backgrounds, and experiences, all brought together by a shared love of the game. It’s amazing to see a 10-year-old teaming up with a college student or a parent playing alongside their child. Everyone is included, and the sense of camaraderie is real.”

**Roman Porter, Age 40**







## **PLAY SPOTLIGHT**

# ***ACCESSIBILITY***



A month before the first Mall Blaster Battle, a local Nerf club member reached out to Planet Mynd Program Director Tom Harrison. She goes by the handle Mighty Shrub. She asked if she could attend the mall blaster battle, even though an injury meant she was wheelchair bound.

When Mr. Harrison was an employment attorney, he was well-versed in the concept of reasonable accommodation. But he did not want to just accommodate a mobility limitation. He wanted to embed the idea of wheeled mobility into the idea of play itself.

After weeks of brainstorming and iteration with Mighty Shrub and others, what emerged was 'Stagecoach'. Players were divided into either bandits or stagecoach workers. With wheelchairs acting as the stagecoach, players operated and escorted the chairs collectively to deliver bank deposits from one town to another. Bandits tried to disable stagecoaches using thrown 'dynamite' (bundles of foam pool noodles), steal the bank deposit, and return it to their hideout.

The goal was to encourage cooperation. The result was a line of young players asking to be the stagecoach. By making the use of a wheelchair an essential element to completion of the objective, the game encouraged players to see people with different mobility abilities as valuable parts of the community.

**We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."**

**–George Bernard Shaw**

## **BENEFIT #2**

**Intergenerational play creates a self-sustaining virtuous circle of affirming behavior.**



# CREATING A VIRTUE CIRCLE WITH PLAY

Except for the safe operation of play equipment, nerf blaster battles do not use age limits. It does not divide players into age brackets. It does not divide players by skill level. As a result, the following occurred during the Program.



- Minors modeled themselves on adults, particularly their behavior. When kids observed some adults sliding during battle, they tried to slide. When games involved scoring points outside of tagging players, young players only attempted these objectives when they saw adults attempting to complete the objective.
- In turn, adults routinely moderated their behavior because minors were present on the play field. At each game, adults helped children they didn't know unjam their blasters, choose blasters, reload, understand rules, and generally enjoy the game.
- The largest observed impact on behavior was seen between parents playing alongside their children.







“One of the standout aspects is the emphasis on sportsmanship. Players, young and old, are encouraged to play fair, show respect, and support each other. It’s heartwarming to see kids helping one another up after a fall or high-fiving teammates and opponents alike after a good match. These small moments create a positive, uplifting atmosphere that sticks with you even after the game ends.”

**Roman Porter**

“My favorite thing about Nerf has honestly been the bonding with my son. We’ve had so many memories and we’ve built so many wonderful memories that are going to carry us for the rest of our lives that we’re going to be able to talk about. And lots of inside jokes.”

**Richard Chambliss**



“Every game offers an opportunity for us to work together as a team, strategize, and cheer each other on—something that strengthens our father-son bond in a way that few other activities do.”

**Roman Porter**

“The morning we were packing up for [the] January event, my son turned to me and said, ‘These are my favorite days.’ It was the best, seeing [my son] smile and excited for our special day.”

**Richard Chambliss**





**It is in large part because we move (and thus must seek what we need to survive and to procreate) that a cognitive system emerged.**  
**-- Kerry L. Marsh, Michael J. Richardson, R.C. Schmidt, "Social Connection Through Joint Action and Interpersonal Coordination", Topics in Cognitive Science 1 (2009) 320-339**

## **BENEFIT #3**

**Games are intentionally designed to keep players engaged in active, immersive and non-violent play.**



# SERIOUS ATTENTION TO PLAY

Every month, prior to the event, Planet Mynd and the moderator team met and designed games that:

- were accessible for all age levels
- encouraged cooperation
- involved scoring objectives that were not based on tagging players.



At the start of each event, players were gathered for a safety briefing. The Program Director and moderators explained:

- The importance of safety
- The most important rule, known as Rule Zero-- Don't be a jerk.
- Conduct do's and don'ts
- The overall rules of distance tag, including how tagging and respawning works.



All games were facilitated.

- A moderator gathered the players and delivered the rules of the game.
- Moderating and volunteer staff monitored each round of play-- enforcing the rules, encouraging objective completion, and keeping score and time.



All games were non-elimination-based. When players were tagged, rather than being eliminated from the game, they returned to base and respawned.

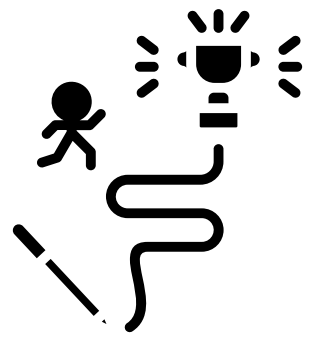
For information about the how nerf differs from other projectile-shooting games, see Appendix D, p. 46.





# GAME INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

## ***SIDE QUESTS***



At the first 2 Mall Blaster Battles in the series, sponsors brought a number of blasters as giveaways. One sponsor arranged the blasters on a counter and scattered toy coins around the play map. During games, players could redeem collected coins for the blasters. At the same time, Planet Mynd raffled away the other sponsor's prizes. It was observed that raffles involved taking a break from play and they often involved players standing quietly waiting for a number. On the other hand, using coins allowed players to stay in the game. Also, they could redeem the coins for prizes on their own time during rest breaks.



For the rest of the series, Planet Mynd assigned student volunteers the specific task of organizing “side quests” and managing the redemption for prizes. As a result, younger children remained engaged in each round of play for the duration of the event. Since the quests were designed by students, they were simple and often playful and silly. One community member created small dart collection bags as a side quest to incentivize young players to participate in dart cleanup after each game round. While most side quest prizes were donated blasters, prizes also included donated Funko Pop! Figures and 3D printed trinkets.



Side quests kept kids off their screens during the play event. Young players often completed quests together and socialized around the side quest area.

**Play is serious business. At stake for us are the ways we socialize and teach future generations of scientists, inventors, artists, explorers, and other individuals who will shape the world in which we live.**  
– Arthur Molella, Lemelson Center Director

## **BENEFIT #4**

**The Nerf Community encourages expression, creativity and ingenuity instead of military simulation.**



# SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

## SILVER FOX INDUSTRIES



To hold the magazines of darts, to holster blasters, and to carry other equipment needed during a day of nerf gaming, players typically shopped army/navy surplus stores or online marketplaces offering tactical gear. Many players felt uncomfortable and unsafe, though, wearing all black or camouflage gear for games in public parks and traveling to games carrying bags of surplus military and military simulation gear.

Enter Ryan and Jesse in Poulsbo, Washington. Through their company Silver Fox Industries, they source, design, and fabricate a variety of parts to build and modify nerf blasters. On July 2, 2023, over dinner Ryan and Jesse talked to friends from New York nerf hobby company Containment Crew about tactical gear. They all thought it would be amazing if it could be colorful. Thus Silver Crew Research + Development (SCRD) tactical gear was born.

SCRD launched its Kickstarter campaign with a \$10,000 goal. They blew past every stretch goal and raised \$36, 501 to make colorful nerf play gear a reality. They sell a variety of bags, belts, and fabric panels in 8 vibrant colors.

In May 2025, SCRD launched its second Kickstarter campaign for additional tactical gear.

Planet Mynd is grateful for their sponsorship of the Mall Blaster Battle Program.







"I like seeing what everyone makes cause there's a lot of ingenuity in nerf. There's people designing blasters, there's people building their own blasters, there's people going to the hardware store assembling things. And see what they build is a lot of fun."

**Lance Alderson, Age 31**



"It doesn't hurt as much as like paintball or airsoft . . . Plus, I get to wear colorful gear now, which is quite different from Airsoft, which typically they're playing war in like camo woodland-looking stuff and black and tan only. More colors."

**Andrew, Age 34**

"There's people that'll run stock things, silly things. They'll make their own, they'll mod things, there's some really top tier kind of competitive stuff. It's amazing seeing what people create."

**Tabitha Vanpevenage**





**PROGRAM EXPANSION VISION:  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES THAT SUSTAIN  
THEIR OWN PLAY WORLDS**

## **A 3 Step Approach**

# STEP 1

## **Launch indoor blaster battles in multiple locations in Snohomish County.**

- 6 month series of once-a-month Nerf Blaster Battles from November 2025 through April 2026.
- Planet Mynd contracts with venues in Snohomish County to offer blaster battles in the northern, southern, eastern, and western parts of the county, as well as in downtown Everett.
- Each blaster battle features:
  - Free easy to operate loaner blasters and free eye protection
  - A chronograph testing station to verify blaster power level
  - Community darts to ensure only approved foam dart types are used
  - Water
  - Lost and found
  - Player rest areas and spectator seating
  - Trained moderator staff to deliver player safety briefings and game rules briefings, to facilitate games, and to referee games
  - Volunteer staff for assorted duties including scorekeeping, game setup, and event setup.
  - Facilitated by volunteer staff, a station where young players can complete tasks and challenges during games as side quests. Points are awarded for the completion of side quests. Points can be redeemed for prizes and trinkets.
- Player amenities, including:
  - Snack food available for purchase
  - Drinks available for purchase
  - Nerf blaster hobby equipment available for purchase
  - A dedicated area for players to repair blasters, seek troubleshooting help from community members, offer blasters for trade, and offer free hobby equipment.
- 2 types of games
  - Main gym: 8&Up game with simple game modes at a 130 FPS (feet per second) blaster power limit
  - Side gym: 15&Up game with faster-paced, multi-objective games at a 180-200 FPS blaster power limit



# PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

## LAUNCHING A "PRO" COMMUNITY

In 2020, the company Prime Time Toys launched the first high performance blasters on store shelves with the Nexus Pro and Aeon Pro blasters. Recommended for ages 14 & Up, their dart velocities of 150+ FPS were 2 and a half times more powerful than the typical Nerf-brand blasters for ages 8 & Up. These blasters typically featured a safety lock.

Players at the regular Mall Blaster Battles brought these and other higher performance blasters, but tuned them to shoot within the lower 130 FPS game limit. On online forums, Planet Mynd received several comments from adults hesitant about playing and tagging young children. Others expressed anxiety at the idea of having their high performance (and often costly) blasters and gear where children could touch and damage them.

Based on the rise in popularity of pro blasters and the expressed concerns, Planet Mynd delivered 2 Pro Blaster Battles. Each was limited to players 15 & Up and the blaster power limit was raised from 130 to 160 FPS. Both events received far less attendance than the regular blaster battles. This occurred despite additional radio spot marketing on local radio stations KRKO and KXA. During outreach to specific players, Program Director Tom Harrison observed that players he thought would be a definite commitment to the event, instead declined to attend, citing travel, work, family commitments, or simply no response at all. Planet Mynd concluded that most adults will give themselves permission to play at a play event only if the event is open to children, and also offers the ability for higher FPS and higher age-restricted play at the same time and location.





# STEP 2

## Blaster Modification and Build Workshop

At various locations, Planet Mynd delivers a workshop series focused on learning to modify and build blasters. Through an interactive process with workspace stations, each session teaches the science behind blaster technology and various methods that can improve performance. All equipment and tools are provide. Each session employs presentation, demonstration, group experiment, and individual labs. The workshops are organized as follows:

- 100 series (4 weekly sessions) (10 students)
  - Springer blaster modification
  - Basic blaster builds
- 200 series (4 weekly sessions) (10 students)
  - Motorized flywheel blaster modifications
  - Flywheel blaster builds
- 300 series (4 weekly sessions) (8 students)
  - Modifying and building flywheel blasters with advanced electronic components
- 400 series (4 weekly sessions) (6 students)
  - Participants will learn to build and program reactive play equipment, such as timers, to use at the monthly play events at their location.

By nurturing a core group of youth in modding and building, it will enhance nerf blaster battle program participation and interest in their local communities.



# STEP 3

## Game Design and Storytelling Workshop

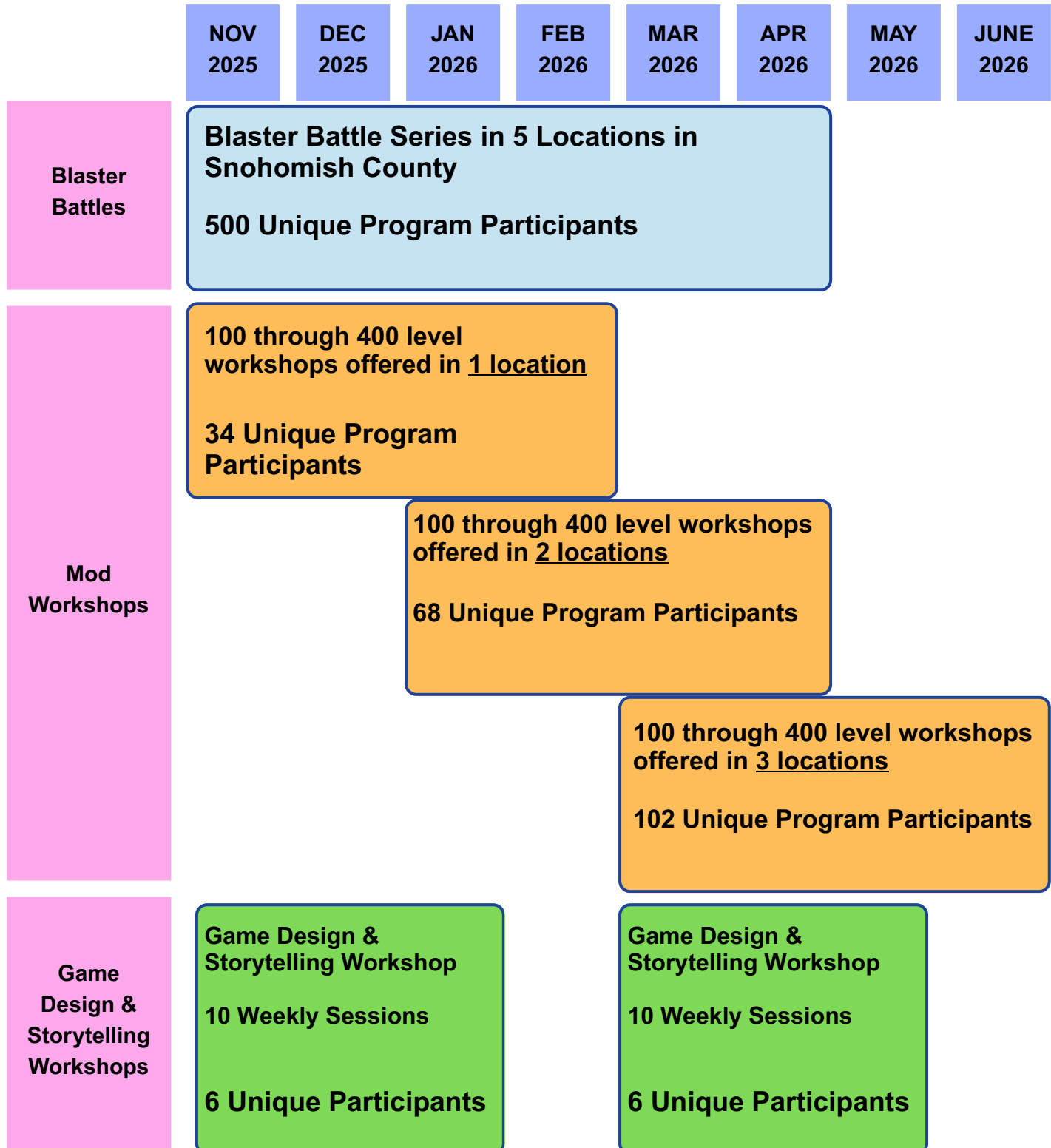
By partnering with venues that have multimedia resources, this workshop series will teach participants how to design compelling games that incorporate story elements. They will use storyboarding, video editing, and script writing to create story content from video and photos from blaster battles. Participants also learn the skills to moderate their created game modes at a blaster battle.



- 10 Weekly Sessions
- 6 enrolled at a time



# EXPANDED PROGRAM IMPACT



**Total Estimated Unique Participants = 716**





# POISED FOR THE NEXT STEPS

- Planet Mynd secured interest from venues for Steps 1 and 2.
  - Boys and Girls Club of Snohomish County
  - First Baptist Church Community Center
- Gained early interest from organizations in community partnership
  - Radio stations KXA and KRKO
  - This Coffee Life
  - Snohomish County Sports Commission
- Planet Mynd secured access to in-depth modding workshop content from online content creator Captain Xavier



# About Tom Harrison



Tom Harrison is proud of many things— his 14-year career as a competitive swimmer, his Economics degree from Princeton University, and his 16 years as a litigation attorney. He is most proud, however, of two accomplishments. First, he intentionally raised his son using play as a platform to build trust and teach values. As a result, he severed generations of parenting through physical violence. Second, he learned to heal his body of its deep physical and emotional wounds— including chronic asthma, anxiety, and PTSD— through practices that include visualization, talk therapy, Tai Chi, yoga, and Qi Gong. His company, Planet Mynd, delivers play programming and workshops that emphasize communal coexistence, active creation, and in-person connection. Through its Blaster Battle Play Program, mentoring program, modding workshops, and activity zones for community events, the company has guided, coached, and connected thousands across Snohomish County.

Tom Harrison

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Founder | Planet Mynd Play Lab

IG: @PlanetMynd. FB: Planet Mynd Play Lab

[www.ProBlasterPlay.com](http://www.ProBlasterPlay.com)



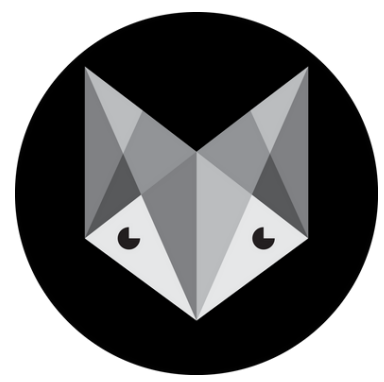
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# MALL BLASTER BATTLE PARTNERS

**OUT OF DARTS**

COMMUNITY  
**FOUNDATION**  
of Snohomish County



**Silver Fox Industries**



**Mighty Shrub**

