**In the Mood for a Game Studio**

**Jordan Tuck**

**St Lawrence College**

**Table of Contents**

1.0 Executive Summary ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 3

2.0 Introduction ………………………………………………………..……………………………………………………………………….. 3

3.0 Background of the Ottawa Indie Gaming ……………………………………………………………………………………….… 3

4.0 The interview ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….. 4

4.1 Daily Work …………………………………………………………………………………………………………..…………….. 4

4.2 Industry and Opportunities ………………………………………………………………………………………………… 4

4.3 Success and Prospects ……………………………………………………………………………………………………..… 4

4.4 Skills and Culture ………………………………………………………………………..……………………………………… 4

5.0 Conclusion/Recommendations ………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 4

6.0 References …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………… 5

Appendix A - Initial Contact ………………….……………………………………………………………………………………………… 6

Appendix B - The Questions …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 7

Appendix C - The Thank You Letter ………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 8

1. **Executive Summary**
2. The PC gaming industry was founded on small, often single person, independent developers.
3. Despite gaining notoriety for high tech in the 80’s, the gaming industry did not flourish in Ottawa.
4. Ottawa now host post secondary schools with game design specific programs.
5. The Federal government is actively supporting startup game companies in Canada.
6. Ottawa is a highly technical and educated city with an extremely small gaming industry.
7. Jillian Mood is a HR consultant that is vigorously promoting the Ottawa gaming industry.
8. Operating a small game studio can be stressful and long work but also can be very rewarding both professionally and financially.
9. There is room in Ottawa, and Canada, for more indie game studios. However care must be taken to keep skills up to date, attract vibrant talent, and keep apprised of new opportunities and platform to develop and distribute games on.
10. Leadership training should be a primary skill to pursue.

**2.0 Introduction**

Ottawa Ontario is a vibrant technology hub of Canada with the IT sector employing more than 70, 000 people (City of Ottawa, 2019). It hosts two colleges and three universities (Wikipedia, 2019); with two of these schools providing game design specific degrees. Yet despite having this highly skilled and educated population it only has a nascent game industry consisting of eight small studios (Gamejobhunter, 2019).

Jillian Mood is an HR and PR consultant that has been working to boost the Ottawa gaming industry for past eleven years (NY Games Confrence, 2017). She is the co-founder of the Ottawa Game Jam, CEO of the Mood Foundation and Jillian Studio Services, both corporations focused on supporting indie gaming and small studios (Mood, 2019). One of her recent successes is creating “The Collective”, a shared office space devoted to game developers (Ottawa Business Journal, 2017). With all this talent and dedication to indie game development, it must surely be possible to create a successful game studio in Ottawa.

**3.0 Background of the Ottawa Indie Gaming**

In the strictest sense of the word Victor Tilley defined an indie game as a computer game that has been developed without the support, marketing, of publishing of a game publisher (V. Tilley, personal communication, 2018). Tabitha Baker documented that in early 80’s, this meant every game available to the newly released Personal Computer was an indie game as there were no publishers for PC games. Purchasing and receiving a game in these days usually involved mailing money to the developer’s home address and in return receiving a copy of the game on a data cassette (T. Baker, 2018).

During the 80’s, Ottawa was also gaining the reputation of “Silicon Valley of the North” due to the large number of high tech firms moving in to the area (Wikipedia, 2019). A documented history of the area’s gaming community is unfortunately not readily available. What game companies that did arise in those days did not survive as the oldest gaming company still functioning is Ottawa today was founded in 2006 (Sanzaru, 2019).

Dispute the difficult history of Ottawa’s gaming industry, there is now plenty of support. Recent additions to post secondary programs have brought Carleton University’s two honors degree minors of Computer Science Game Design and Video Game Engineering to the region(Carleton University, 2019). Algonquin College also now hosts a Game Development program as well as an animation program (Algonquin College, 2019). This is on top of the numerous software and art degrees offered by all five of the post secondary schools of the Ottawa area.

The Federal Government of Canada is also in on the game of supporting indie studios with the “Canadian Media Fund”, which is specifically designed for media content creators (Canada Media Fund, 2019). This is also on top of numerous other federal, provincial, and municipal programs for start up businesses (Ottawa Board of Trade, 2019). With all this interest in education, funding, and support of the game industry in Ottawa, the only thing left is ambitious and creative developers to take up the challenge and start an independent game studio.

**4.0 The interview**

**4.1 Daily Work**

Jillian Mood, CEO of Jillian Studio Services, find that starting a game studio can involve very long hours; with some weeks running up to eighty hours. When asked what her biggest challenges can be, she finds it the legal and accounting side of the business is most difficult to her. Being a creative person, it is not easy for her to spend a large amount of time on administration. She recommends hiring on supporting services and consultants can really help if you find the right people. Success or failure in her mind is all in the studio owner’s hands. This can be particularly stressful when other people’s livelihoods are at stake (J. Mood, personal conversation, 2019).

Jillian does not find though that it is all work without reward. When asked what people find most enjoyable about running a small studio, she says it is the flexibility of having your own schedule, creating your own team, and making your own decisions. As an independent operator, studios can develop their own culture and environment (J. Mood, personal conversation, 2019).

**4.2 Industry and Opportunities**

Jillian feels there is “absolutely!” room for a new game studio in the industry. That being said she also feels that it is also very important to take advantage of government programs to mitigate the overhead costs of starting a new studio. Despite having many schools and game programs in Ottawa, she feels that a “talent shortage” in Canada will be future problem. Game Studios are often looking for experienced people, so new graduates will have difficulty filling this need. She recommends keeping busy with personal game projects and joining game jams for those needing to bridge the experience gap (J. Mood, personal conversation, 2019).

When looking to the future to what challenges and opportunities may lie five years ahead, Jillian Mood noted the new game streaming services such as “Apple Arcade” and “Stadia”. She also feels a stronger push for more global distribution of indie games and better revenue distribution will help the future industry. The burgeoning field of VR games is also has interesting opportunities to her (J. Mood, personal conversation, 2019).

**4.3 Success and Prospects**

When asked about how successful studios usually start, she finds it is often developers from larger studios that want to create their own studios. They often incorporate as a team and use past successful titles to help support government funding and tax credits. She says that potential revenue of a small studio can be very wide, from wildly successful multi-million dollar titles to studios that barely managed. It all depends on the content, publishing avenues taken, and the games target market (Mood, 2019).

**4.4 Skills and Culture**

In order to have a successful indie studio, Jillian thinks that leadership training is key, although she also feels that being humble and always learning are also very important. When considering staff, she finds it is best to look for creative people that wish to strive and try new things. To find these people she suggests attending gaming events and game jams to network as much as possible. When asked for a further lead to contact, she suggested Kate Edwards, the former Executive Director of the International Gamers Association.

**5.0 Conclusion/Recommendations**

The Ottawa gaming industry has been underdeveloped for far too long considering its educated and technical population. New game avenues for distributing and marketing games, such as Steam, Google Play, and even self publishing have never been more easily accessible to small time developers. Even governments of all levels are also eager to help start up studios. All of this coupled with a wide variety powerful but low priced tools and the time couldn’t be better suited for and aspiring indie game studio. This is not to say there are no challenges to success, but with the confluence technology, government programs, education, and people like Jillian Mood, there is no better time to start and indie game studio.

**6.0 References**

City of Ottawa. (2019). Economy and Demographics. Retrieved from <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/budget/financial-reports-and-statements/long-range-financial-plans/long-range-financial-plan-iii-part-1-and-part-2/economy-and-demographics>

Wikipedia. (2019). List of Schools in Ottawa. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_schools_in_Ottawa>

Gamejobhunter. (2019). Video Game Companies in Ottawa. Retrieved from <https://gamejobhunter.com/local-video-game-companies-ottawa/>

New York Games Conference. (2019). Jillian Mood. Retrieved from <https://www.nygamesconference.com/speaker/jillian-mood/>

Mood, J. (2019). Jillian Mood. Retrieved from <https://ca.linkedin.com/in/hrwonderwoman>

Lord, C. (2017). Independent Ottawa gaming studios to unite in common space. Retrieved from <https://obj.ca/article/independent-ottawa-gaming-studios-unite-common-space>

Baker, T. (2018), The Complete History of Indie Games. Retrieved from <https://www.indiegamewebsite.com/2018/10/19/the-complete-history-of-indie-games/>

Sanzaru. (2019). Company. Retrieved from <https://www.sanzaru.com/company/>

Carleton University. (2019). Computer Game Development. Retrieved from <https://admissions.carleton.ca/programs/computer-game-development/>

Carleton University. (2019). Computer Animation and Video Game Design. Retrieved from <https://carleton.ca/engineering-design/areas-of-expertise/computer-animation-and-video-game-design/>

Algonquin College. (2019). Game Development. Retrieved from <https://www.algonquincollege.com/mediaanddesign/program/game-development/>

Canada Media Fund. (2017). Mandate and Vision. Retrieved from <https://www.cmf-fmc.ca/about-us>

Ottawa Board of Trade. (2017). Business Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.ottawabot.ca/member-resources/>

**Appendix A - Initial Contact**

1124 Stokes Drive

Cornwall, Ont.

K6J 5J5

Jillian Mood

Chief Executive Officer

Jillian Studio Services

981 Wellington West

Ottawa, Ont.

K1Y 2Y1

Dear Ms Mood

My name is Jordan Tuck, I am a game design student at St Lawrence College. I would like to discuss with you the benefits and pitfalls of starting and maintaining a small independent game studio.

As a former professional programmer and mature student at the college, I am seeking to apply my new education towards creating my studio. I would very much welcome the opportunity to talk with you about your adventures on the path to becoming a successful game developer.

With your permission; this talk is to be the basis for a report on the Ottawa gaming industry to my Communications 234 class. I have attached a list of questions I have of the professional gaming scene in Ottawa. If you are available within the next few weeks I would like to offer you a lunch meeting in exchange for sharing your experience and time.

If there is no time for lunch in your schedule, we can also communicate through email, skype, or phone.

Thank you for your consideration and I wish you all the best in your endeavors.

I look forward to hearing from you

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Jordan Tuck 

St Lawrence College Student

613-861-9258

Jordan.Tuck@sl.on.ca

**Appendix B - The Questions**

**Daily Work**

1. What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?  
2. What parts of your job do you find most challenging?  
3. What do you find most enjoyable?  
4. Are there any negatives to your job?  
5. How many hours do you work in a typical week?  
6. How would you describe the corporate culture?

**Industry and Opportunities**

7. Is the gaming industry growing enough so that there is room for a new studio?  
8. Are too many or too few people entering this profession?  
9. What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?  
10. What are some of the industry changes you have seen over the last 5 years?  
11. What changes do you think there will be in the next 5 years?  
12. Why do people close their studios?

**Success and Prospects**

14. What is a reasonable earnings progression for a new studio? What is the long-term potential?  
15. How did start your studio?  
16. If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way?   
17. What is the background of most development studio directors?

**Skills and Culture**

18. What further education would you recommend for a successful studio director?  
19. What qualifications do you seek in new employees?  
19. How do most people enter the indie game community?  
21. Do you think I have the background to manage a game studio?  
22. How does your company compare with others in the area?  
23. What personal attributes are essential for success?  
25. What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?  
26. Is there anything else you think I need to know?  
27. Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I contact them, may I use your name?

**Appendix C - The Thank You Letter**

1124 Stokes Dr.  
Cornwall, Ont.  
K6J 5J5

November 9, 2019

Jillian Mood  
Chief Executive Officer  
Jillian Studio Services  
981 Wellington St. W.  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1Y 2Y1

Dear Jillian

Thank you for taking the time to reply to my questions about operating an indie studio and the Ottawa gaming community. I very much appreciate that you made the effort despite my contacting you at a difficult time.

Your responses are invaluable and I am eager to research further into your suggestions and recommendations. I look forward to meeting you one day when we are both settled in Ottawa and perhaps even able to work together.

I hope all goes well in Halifax and that you continue to succeed in your support of small gaming studios.

Sincerely

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Jordan Tuck   
St Lawrence College Student  
613-861-9258  
[Jordan.Tuck@sl.on.ca](mailto:Jordan.Tuck@sl.on.ca)