Originally from Istanbul, Turkey, Ali Kokulu came to Canada to attend George Brown, but the 30-year-old had no idea he’d end up assistant producer and designer on the development of Stringer, a virtual reality first aid training tool for journalists heading to combat situations and conflict areas.

The “serious game,” created between July and December of last year, is a collaboration between 3D game application developer Cinema Suite and GBC’s School of Design, including six students from the game programming, game development, and game design programs. Development for the game was funded via a $30,000 grant from the Ontario Centres of Excellence.

Ben Sainsbury, the industry partner from Cinema Suite, initially brought the idea of collaborating to the school. While studying at University of Southern California, he got wind of intriguing tests on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by the school’s research arm the Institute for Creative Technologies. “They were using the Oculus Rift and Unity game engine to take people back into the incident that caused them the post-traumatic stress and desensitizing them so they can work through their trauma,” says Sainsbury. “We talked about doing a Canadian version.”

He brought the concept to several Canadian institutions including the Chief Psychiatrist of the Canadian Armed Forces, but the organizations were trepid about adopting the unproven concept, some even said they’d rather build it in house using their own resources. “We treated it almost like a video game. We had animators, artists, programmers,” says Sainsbury.

They also called in experts to consult, including journalists who had been in conflict zones and Mike Webster from Wilderness Medical Associates International, to make sure the training was on the level. “We treated it almost like a video game. We had animators, artists, programmers,” says Sainsbury. “We treated it almost like a video game. We had animators, artists, programmers.”

“[Stringer] has a serious purpose. We’re training journalists that are going to go into war scenarios what to expect.”

JEAN-PAUL AMORE, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

He heard through the grapevine that through Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) funding George Brown has a mandate to do e-health projects and research involving tech and healthcare treatment. “So I told them about this project,” says Sainsbury, adding that they thought it was a great idea. “We treated it almost like a video game. We had animators, artists, programmers.”

“[Stringer] has a serious purpose. We’re training journalists that are going to go into war scenarios what to expect.”

JEAN-PAUL AMORE, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

They also called in experts to consult, including journalists who had been in conflict zones and Mike Webster from Wilderness Medical Associates International, to make sure the training was on the level.

“We did our research for the design of the game,” says Jean-Paul Amore, Producer and Principle Investigator from George Brown for the project. “It has a serious purpose. We’re training journalists that are going to go into war scenarios what to expect and they need to understand first aid.”