

Life Sherpa

ON THE JOB



Expanding Life

STUDY SUGGESTS LIFESHERPA APPLICATION PROMOTES SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE FOR MASONLIFE STUDENTS

Young adults with special needs are no strangers to victory. They have accomplished, achieved and ascended beyond expectation of parents, teachers and society. But the path is often unique, with unexpected twists and turns, waiting places and difficult seasons.

For many, the cadence is different, with long periods of slow growth followed by giant leaps of progress. Availability to learn is underpinned by many factors--and for many, some seasons prove more fruitful than others.

Coming of age as a young adult with special needs is rife with challenges—employment is one of the toughest. For some, securing a job has proven easier than keeping it, for a multitude of reasons. Special education, which many students with special needs spend their formative years—offered a highly structured environment, rooted in predictable schedules, teacher-prompted transitions and specialized, granular benefit-reward systems. Students who have spent their formative years in special education become hardwired to rely on teachers to prompt the transition to the next task. By the time they are seniors, many

students have mastered the special education process, showing consistent progress on their IEP goals—but does this make them ready for the workplace? Not necessarily.

Robin Moyher, Assistant Program Director and head researcher, and Dr. Heidi Graff, Program Director, are the forces behind MasonLife, an innovative, four-year post secondary program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) at George Mason University. As pioneers in the field of education of adult learners with challenges, they know the issues all too well. They have a program full of capable, eager, hard-working and engaging adult learners whose success in the classroom has not always been replicated in the workplace.

In the workplace, employee initiative is valued. Cruising through a to-do list or a daily cadence of responsibilities is expected--without prompting. The challenge for educators, parents and adult learners is how to replicate classroom success in the workplace, without burdening the employer.

Although many companies understand the measurable advantages of hiring people with special needs, they have lacked access to the technological tools to make it successful for all stakeholders.

To explore solutions, MasonLife partnered with Life Sherpa, a technology company founded and led by Doug Meeker, dedicated to bridging the solution gap between employers and employees with special needs. Life Sherpa is a user-driven application that transforms a smartphone into an employment coach, leveraging a benefit-reward system to address on-the-job performance challenges.

The application identifies and tracks the targeted behaviors, and can be customized for each student. Students can track their progress throughout their work shift and are rewarded via the application when they reach their goal. Rewards can be customized--for example, space enthusiasts may see an animated visual of a rocket taking off; a basketball fan may see a three point shot dunked by their favorite player.

In a pilot study with five Mason Life students, commissioned by Modus Create, the increased presence of specified work-related skills was assessed using the Brigance, WAI and Vineland measurement tools, and user feedback was solicited from students and support staff. Study participants included two students with Down Syndrome, two students with Fragile X Syndrome, and one student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Participants included men and women ages 18-25. Results were also tracked for five students who were not using the Life Sherpa app, which served as the control group.

In the context of the work environment, the following behaviors were tracked: the student's overall quality of work, the ability to refrain from interruption, ask and answer questions clearly, avoid talking or asking about personal topics, show appropriate emotions, proactively seek work assignment and gather needed materials for the session, review work task procedures, try first to solve problems that arise and request more work when finished.

Here's the good news--the research showed the students who used the Life Sherpa app on the job showed an increase in the targeted skills. The research study revealed using the Life Sherpa app showed an increase in productivity and an improvement in "soft skills". Soft skills are a predictor of success in the workplace--they rely on an ability to accurately assess social cues and context clues to generate socially appropriate responses. Soft skill development often relies on social learning which can be a challenge for people with special needs.

Maybe even more important--the students and staff liked using Life Sherpa--a testament to its usability, customizable interface and intuitive user experience. The small sample size prevents us from claiming statistical significance--however, evidence it worked for a subset of adult learners is enough for many of us to feel hopeful--and give it a chance. After all, life is not about what is promised, it's about what is possible.

For a more detailed discussion on the research study, access the white paper.

Life Sherpa Can Be All Things!

– Zach

Zach's Work

Zach works in the Mason LIFE Leadership Office and is responsible for:

- Paperwork
- Shredding
- Faxing

Zach's Challenges

- Staying on task
- Regulating verbal communication

How **Life Sherpa** was Applied:

Life Sherpa provided specific tasks customized to Zach's challenges.

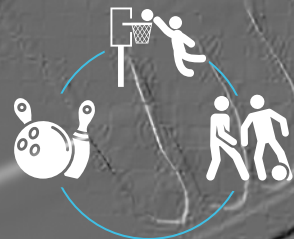
Zach's Success:

These tasks successfully guided him in **staying focused** and provided him **clear direction** on appropriate verbal communication. Life Sherpa rewarded him with a visual confirmation of his success.

What I **LOVE** most about Mason LIFE:

Teachers and students are **very** nice. My favorite class is history where we study the monarchies!

Zach's Hobbies



“What I love most about Life Sherpa: Getting the Rewards, The Rocketship!”

— Jeyoon

Jeyoon's Work

Campus Aquatic Fitness Center.

Jeyoon's Challenges

Spontaneous off-topic conversation while checking in guests.

How Life Sherpa was Applied:

Life Sherpa provided specific tasks customized to Jeyoon's challenges.

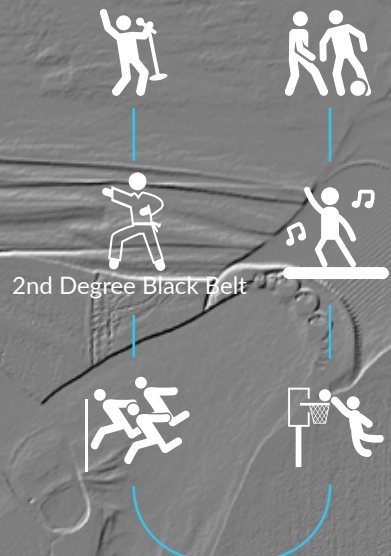
Jeyoon's Success:

Decrease in off-topic conversation; improvement in soft skills.

What I LOVE most about Mason LIFE:

Making New Friends!

Jeyoon's Hobbies



“Life Sherpa could be helpful for all of us!”

– Dillon

Dillon's Work

- Data entry
- Computer work
- Photocopying

Dillon's Challenges

Transitioning between tasks without prompting.

How **Life Sherpa** was Applied:

Life Sherpa provided specific tasks customized to Dillon's challenges.

Dillon's Success:

Improvement of overall work quality; improved transition between tasks.

What I **LOVE** most about Mason **LIFE**:

“Working hard!”

Dillon's Hobbies

