

Job Coaching in an Internship Program

CHALLENGE

Use a digital coaching app to change work performance of students with IDD preparing to transition from school to work

SOLUTION

LifeSherpa assistive technology platform

RESULTS

Tailored digital coaching has a positive impact on job performance and experience, further allowing occupational performance to be maximized for each person

“I think it’s a really big benefit to use it in any workplace setting, genuinely. I’ve tested these kinds of platforms before and this is the best one that I’ve piloted so far.”

-Support Professional involved with the study

St. Joseph’s University works with an international organization that supports students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) to transition from school to work. The program aims to provide interns with the necessary skills to become responsible and employable adults. They are trained in various job tasks through traditional job coaching methods through educating interns on workplace norms and rotating through a specific area of a hospital for 10-12 weeks. Each intern requires unique intervention approaches to meet their individual needs.

A Digital Way To Support Job Performance

The United States has 6.5 million individuals with IDD, with limited resources and programs for their transition into the workforce. Only 7.5% of students with disabilities receive occupational therapy during their transitional years, leading to challenges in finding adequate employment. Occupational therapy is critical in vocational training, with 90% of job loss among individuals with disabilities attributed to a lack of occupational and social support during the transition.

The study focuses on participants, 18-21-year-olds with IDD, to ensure they have necessary support during their transition from student to employee. Occupational therapists play a unique role in helping individuals with IDD be more independent and prepared.

However, that comes with its unique share of challenges:

- Lack of support and resources
- Unpredictable issues during the transition process
- Limited availability

The St. Joseph's team and international organization knew that they needed to innovate to overcome specific barriers, including time constraint between support professional and intern, limited one-on-ones, and the challenge of skill improvement that is treated on a case by case basis. They identified that a digital coaching app has the potential to support individuals with IDD manage job tasks by increasing their independence, improving emotional regulation, and promoting personal advocacy skills all from the palm of their hands.

The Use of Digital Coaching Apps to Improve Occupational Performance

The use of digital apps has increased in the healthcare field, particularly in occupational therapy practice, in the past decade. A review of 14 apps showed that they have the potential to enhance coaching within occupational therapy practice, including providing feedback, allowing for individualized goal setting, offering choices to the user, and tracking progress.

However, it is important to consider the contextual factors of the patient before using the apps. Digital coaching apps can support individuals with task analysis, emotional regulation, communication skills, and more. Although the studies provide great insight into the benefits of technology among individuals with IDD, it is important to note that how support professionals use the app in each individual case is crucial.

The Right Assistive Tool

Versatile and configurable, LifeSherpa supports standard and individualized routines with notifications and reminder functions for both support staff and Program participants. LifeSherpa developers work closely to customize the platform to meet the Program's needs.

LifeSherpa gave participants the ability to help neurodiverse individuals gain work experience while improving their confidence and productivity by:

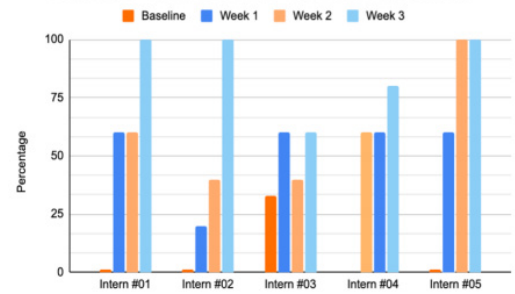
- Increased independence and success in task completion, reducing the need for staff support
- Step-by-step guidance that increased the accuracy, timing of tasks and overall performance
- Improved productivity and accountability, reducing the time spent away from work
- Support video aided in a new skill development, which they continued to use after the study

Notable Performance Progress Over Time

Within a matter of a few weeks, interns showed massive improvements, with 3 out of 5 interns reporting an increase in performance.

Both intern and support professionals found that digital coaching apps allowed occupational performance to be maximized for both parties within the context of the environment.

Percent of Observed Trials That Met Expectations



“LifeSherpa is a way for the intern to get that affirmation, feel that she is doing it correctly and that she’s not messing up. That’s a big trigger for her, she doesn’t want to mess up. So having that guidance with her at all times, whenever she felt doubt, she was able to go to it and see that she was doing it correctly. I think that was a huge help for her, not only in this rotation but in the previous rotation.”

Support Professional in reference to Intern #05

“Having tasks in LifeSherpa kept him focused on what each step is and make sure that he does each step. If it was just him without that guide, I don’t think he would have gotten to where he is now.”

Support Professional in reference to Intern #02

“I think overall it really just allows the intern to increase their independence way faster than without and give them the sense that “I’m doing this on my own instead of needing a coach with me a lot of the time.”

Support Professional involved in the study

The Tremendous Potential of Digital Coaching Apps

Digital coaching apps have shown promise as a useful assistive tool for individuals with disabilities in a work environment. However, it is important to tailor the use of these apps to meet the specific needs of each individual.

Organic integration of coaching apps may lead to more reliable results and potentially replace job coaches when they are not available full-time for paid employment. The use of Environmental and Human Performance (EHP) principles to guide interventions can help maximize occupational performance within the context of an individual’s environment.

Overall, the use of digital coaching apps, like LifeSherpa, had a positive impact on job performance and job experience. Future studies with larger sample sizes are necessary to understand the full significance of coaching apps for this population in a work environment.



To see how LifeSherpa can help your organization, request a demo by scanning the QR code

About LifeSherpa

LifeSherpa is the digital support platform that makes life and work easier for everyone—manager or staff, neurodiverse or neurotypical. The company was founded by Doug Meeker, digital media and technology veteran and father of a son with autism. LifeSherpa grew out of Doug’s passion to help his son Scott, and others, meet life’s challenges.

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