

Impact Report

Clemson[®]LIFE
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Since 2008, ClemsonLIFE (Learning is for Everyone) has established itself as a national model for post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities by providing premier collegiate experiences, competitive employment preparation and independent living through a combination of on-campus academic coursework and career exploration.

While national employment outcomes for this population range between 14 and 34 percent, nearly all (97 percent) ClemsonLIFE graduates are employed after graduation. Similarly, while nationally only 16 percent of adults with intellectual disabilities live on their own, two-thirds (67 percent) of ClemsonLIFE graduates are now living independently. This amazing program provides these young adults with a chance to be college students and gain the maturity, skills, independence and life experiences that might otherwise be out of reach.

In the spring of 2024, ClemsonLIFE received a \$512,862 grant to implement assistive technology across three South Carolina post-secondary education (PSE) programs serving students with intellectual disabilities. The funding will provide technologies and extensive professional training by Apple on how to best utilize these technologies to enhance (a) academic instruction (e.g., flexible text, Live Text, augmented reality, Visual Look Up); (b) independent living (e.g., fall detection, medical identification, Apple Wallet); (c) social inclusion (e.g., Messages App, Check in, Journal); (d) employment (e.g., Accessibility Assistant, Notes App, Task Analysis App, Reminder App); and (e) health & wellness by using an Apple watch to track emotional awareness and resilience, health trends (e.g., menstrual tracking), and fitness activity. This partnership will result in program improvements and contribute to global research on the efficacy and scalability of modern post-secondary education programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities.



HIGH IMPACT PARTNERSHIPS

ClemsonLIFE has become one of the leading interdisciplinary research programs in postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. To date, we have partnered with:

The School of Computing to develop three iOS smartphone apps (i.e. Task Analysis, Meal Planning, Community Navigation) to help individuals with disabilities live and work more independently.

The International Center for Automotive Research (ICAR) to develop a comprehensive driver training program using the DriveSafety CDS-200 driving simulator to safely screen and train individuals with disabilities who have the capability to drive safely.

The Department of Food Nutrition and Science to address the obesity and health issues that are prevalent among individuals with disabilities.

The Watt Family Innovation Center to investigate how assistive technology can improve employment and independent living outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The School of Nursing to develop curriculum to train females with intellectual disabilities on menstrual health and hygiene.

ClemsonLIFE Goes Abroad



In the summer of 2024, ClemsonLIFE completed its second study abroad trip to Ireland. Joe Ryan, ClemsonLIFE's founder and executive director, was named a U.S. Fulbright Scholar to Ireland, and collaborated with the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities at Trinity College in Dublin. This partnership established a study abroad experience which enabled ClemsonLIFE students to participate in Trinity College's summer school program.

Both Trinity College and Clemson University share a common goal of providing inclusive higher education and comprehensive support for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The two programs work together to exchange best practices, share resources and enhance their respective curricula. The partnership also facilitated joint research initiatives, enabling researchers from both institutions to work together on projects related to inclusive education, disability studies and transitioning students into employment or further education. These combined expertise and resources have led to valuable insights, advancements in the field and improvements in the educational outcomes for these students.



ECONOMIC IMPACT IN SOUTH CAROLINA AND BEYOND

ClemsonLIFE opened its doors in 2009 as a two-year program with three staff members and an initial cohort of six students. Since then, our program has grown into a nationally recognized four-year program with 53 students, 20 faculty and staff, and over 600 trained volunteers. There are now more than 100 alumni of the program, and countless members of the Clemson Family have benefitted from being friends, classmates, teammates, roommates and colleagues with LIFE students – heightening disability awareness and a culture of inclusive excellence. The success of ClemsonLIFE has drawn more than 90 colleges and universities from across the United States to seek guidance on either starting or expanding their post-secondary education programs.

ClemsonLIFE is a life-changing program that has a profound social and economic impact. Students who complete post-secondary education are more likely to be employed and have greater financial independence, reducing the need for public subsidization. ClemsonLIFE also provides business and industry with an opportunity to grow and diversify their workforce. Partners such as The Shepherd Hotel are demonstrating that it is possible to pursue a social mission of inclusion and simultaneously be profitable.

Given the program's recent growth and the number of graduates who are electing to stay in the local area after graduation, the available employment and living opportunities in Clemson are becoming saturated. The leaders of ClemsonLIFE and the College of Education are exploring opportunities to expand the program's impact in the greater Greenville area through a new program: ClemsonLIFE ACES (Alumni Coaching for Employment Success). This pilot program is supported through the generous support of friends and partners of the program and College.