**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

# The Apple iPad: Innovative Employment Support for Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities

## A Quick Look

Individuals with developmental disabilities struggle with social interaction and behaviors, which may create issues with independence, motivation, task completion, organization, social connection, and employability. Tablets provide a promising intervention platform to address these barriers. Previous research has shown that tablets and their apps do increase independence for the user. Young adults tend to adopt tablets and other data devices easily because they are a common part of the culture, and thus do not have assistive technology stigma. Prompting from tablets may also be easier to accept than from a person. The device is believed to foster independence from teachers and support personnel. The utilization of the tablet to reinforce skills associated with independence can also continue once the young adult leaves schooling or training. The article provides three cases studies and a literature review on the use of the iPad for employment support for young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

## Key Findings

* Personalized video stories (digital social stories) provide prompting and structure that are easily accessible on a tablet.
* Reminder apps increased focus, confidence and reduced stress.
* Calendar and list applications allow for increased independence due to use of life skills such as: medication management, grocery shopping, meal planning, cleaning, tracking work schedules, making doctors’ appointments, and other activities of daily life.
* Gaming apps and YouTube help reduce anxiety.
* Setting alarms on the tablet or on a smart phone may be needed as a reminder to utilize the calendar and lists.
* The use of targeted apps for reminders, reduction of anxiety, structure and prompting eliminated some young adults’ dependence on job coaches, and increased independence in all three individuals.

## Putting It Into Practice

* Training the young adults on applications and use of the tablet (if needed) is important.
* Applications need to be selected based on the needs of the individual. Input about needs from teachers, life coaches, parents, and support personnel is beneficial.
* Syncing the tablet with the smart phone has positive results, since the information and reminders are on two platforms.
* The tablet is not a cure all. Other interventions and support that target social interaction and behaviors, employment, and education are still needed.
* Tablets are relatively inexpensive compared to other assistive technology.

## Learn More

* Results are based on a literature review and investigation of the Triumph Project participant’s use of the iPad. Initially, 8 participants were identified. The researchers case studies focused on 3 individuals with ASD to see how the iPad impacts independence.

## Source

Hill, D. A., Belcher, L., Brigman, H. E., Renner, S., & Stephens, B. (2013). The Apple iPad™ as an innovative employment support for young adults with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities. Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, 44(1), 28-37.

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