



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Dakota State University & LifeScape Partner to Create Innovative Protective Gear**

Madison, SD – Dakota State University (DSU) and LifeScape have announced a collaborative research project that aims to revolutionize employee safety for direct care staff who work with children diagnosed with developmental disabilities, “Applied research like this is what DSU does best — connecting student and faculty expertise with community needs in a way that creates lasting change,” explains Dr. José-Marie Griffiths, President of Dakota State University.

The partnership, sponsored by a \$50,000 donation raised by the LifeScape Foundation, focuses on developing lightweight, discreet protective clothing that reduces injuries from biting, scratching or pinching that may occur during maladaptive behaviors, “Partnerships like this are vital. When universities and care organizations come together, we can create solutions that directly improve the safety and well-being of both staff and those we serve,” says Steve Watkins, CEO of LifeScape. “Every dollar we invest in this project goes directly toward protecting the people who provide care every day. That’s a mission worth funding,” states Jessica Wells, President of LifeScape Foundation.

This initiative reflects a growing national focus on workplace safety. In 2023, OSHA launched a formal rulemaking process toward a federal standard. For organizations like LifeScape, this national momentum reinforced the urgent need for practical, real-world solutions to keep employees safe while preserving dignity for the children and adults they support, “Every detail of this project — from materials, to fit, to testing — was guided by one question: how can we better protect our employees and, in turn, better serve our children,” explains Stephanie Sherard, Vice President of Children’s Residential and Education at LifeScape. “Our behavioral support teams are competency-based trained to de-escalate and manage these situations with a supportive approach; however unmet behavioral needs can still happen. This clothing gives our staff an added layer of safety and protection to allow for continued support.”

Creating the protective plates was the brainchild of LifeScape Occupational Therapist Arlen Klamm, who has worked for the nonprofit for over 30 years, “I wanted to create something lightweight and functional that can be worn comfortably and unobtrusively by our direct care staff. The idea that it’s now becoming reality — and will keep people safe — is incredibly rewarding,” says Klamm. Many iterations were developed using 3D printing,

various materials, and thoroughly assessed by LifeScape. DSU's AdapT Lab team, led by Dr. Justin Blessinger, then collaborated with Klamm to refine the design to ensure each plate was able to mold to the contours of the body, while also providing ventilation to prevent direct care staff from overheating. "At DSU's AdapT Lab, our mission is to use technology to improve lives. This project is a perfect example of applied creativity — turning a great idea into a functional solution," explains Dr. Blessinger. "We worked through countless prototypes, adjusting materials and design, to find the right balance of protection and comfort. The collaboration with LifeScape was essential to get it right."

Ten prototype garments will be assessed by LifeScape employees this fall, with further modifications and additional garment designs planned for 2026.

### **About LifeScape**

*LifeScape is an independent, nonprofit organization empowering children and adults to live their best lives through specialized healthcare, education, and rehabilitation services. Based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, LifeScape provides hospital, residential, behavioral health, and community-based supports for people with complex medical needs and disabilities. LifeScape's Outpatient Services offer therapy, medical, and psychological care for children and adults at locations in both Sioux Falls and Rapid City, as well as through outreach across the region. Through every program, LifeScape's expert teams are committed to empowering people to live their best life. Learn more at [lifescapesd.org](http://lifescapesd.org).*

### **About Dakota State University**

*Dakota State University (DSU) is located in Madison, S.D. Founded in 1881, DSU offers undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs through its colleges of arts and sciences, business and information systems, computer and cyber sciences, and education. DSU has a special focus on the development, application, implications, and impacts of computing, information technologies and cyber security in all areas of human endeavor. DSU has Center of Academic Excellence designations in cyber defense, cyber operation, and cyber research from the U.S. National Security Agency and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. DSU is home to the Madison Cyber Labs (MadLabs®), a cyber R&D hub with research clusters that explore and advance technology application, workforce development, business expansion, economic growth, and policy improvement across multiple disciplines and fields. DSU also has a growing Applied Research Lab and is one of two state institutions in the Center for Quantum Information Science & Technology. For more information, contact [mediarelations@dsu.edu](mailto:mediarelations@dsu.edu), 605-270-3816, or visit the DSU website at [dsu.edu](http://dsu.edu).*