

An Exploration of a Law Enforcement Program for Young Adults with Disabilities:

Views from Parents and Job Coaches and the Role of Stigma

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Abstract

After graduating high school, individuals with disabilities face stigma and have difficulty obtaining employment and acceptance. Community programs such as the first law enforcement program that integrates young adults with disabilities into their workforce are seen as a solution. Thus, this study examines this unique program and its ability to reduce the stigma of individuals with disabilities. It also examines whether it is perceived to be a beneficial program in preparing young adults with disabilities toward meaningful and productive lives in their community. While symbolic interaction theories imply that the social construction of stigma relates to the exceedingly low employment rates for young adults with disabilities, it is pertinent to find out how stigma affects their parents and their own daily lives. Hence, through a qualitative approach, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents and job coaches (n=9) whose children/clients had graduated from this 6 month program. Interviews with the job coaches found that the program was beneficial in providing the cadets with job skills (4/5 cadets obtained a job as a result), and that it reduces the stigma involving young adults with disabilities within the police department. The interviews with the parents revealed that they and their child were stigmatized, however after being a part of this program, their children were afforded with acceptance, employment, confidence, and a sense of purpose. Due to the program's success, police departments and other public service agencies should be encouraged to implement individuals with disabilities into their workforce. For future research, tracking the cadets over a longer period of time to see if they maintain their jobs, as well as interviewing police officers who worked with the cadets to see how their perceptions transformed about individuals with disabilities, should also be pursued.

Introduction and Summary of Study

In the United States, young adults with intellectual disabilities are often met with limitations and barriers upon leaving the high school setting. Like any graduate, these young adults must decide how to integrate themselves into their community through relationships, employment, and/or further education. As mandated by the federal government, the high school special education curriculum strives to provide the skills for independent living and employment after graduation (Carter et al. 2013). In reality, low employment rates for those with intellectual disabilities are alarming and have remained the same for the last 30 years (Hunter and Storey 2014). With one in three people in the United States having an intellectual disability, approximately *70% are unemployed* (Hunter and Storey 2014). Left to combat these high unemployment rates are the parents, who must fight for their children's inclusion as an adult in the community and workplace. The family is the "only consistent source of support for individuals with disabilities after they graduated from high school," which is akin to a full-time, stressful job (Ankeny, Wilkins, and Spain 2009: 30-31).

One solution that reduces the burden that parents face is community job programs. These programs are facilitated by job coaches, and integrate these young adults into jobs in their community. However, the lack of accessibility, low funding, and knowledge of community programs creates few opportunities for young adults with intellectual disabilities (McDonough and Revell 2010; Hunter and Storey 2014). Additionally, community programs that integrate these young adults into jobs that are meaningful and non-stereotypical for individuals with disabilities - such as programs involving political and leadership roles, like law enforcement - have been shown to be successful (Carter et al. 2013; Hunter and Storey 2014). Unfortunately, up until this point, no community programs in the United States that allow disabled adults to participate in police departments have been assessed.

This study evaluates and examines a unique community program for young adults with disabilities implemented by a police department in a southern city in the United States. In this inaugural

program, a class of five “cadets” with disabilities ranging from Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down syndrome, and visual impairments were given uniforms, engaged in meaningful tasks at the department headquarters, and had daily social interactions with police officers. In May of 2015, a preliminary evaluation of the program was conducted through observational research and semi-structured interviews with the program coordinator and the five cadet participants. The study focused on how the cadets were able to create a sense of self, engage in impression management, define situations, and interact effectively with others in the program. It also focused on the reduction of stigma of the cadets within the police department.

In an effort to expand this previous study, this research investigates parent perspectives of the five (now graduated) cadets, as well as the job coaches through semi-structured interviews. This study examines the following research question: How effective is the program in preparing young adults with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community? Specific questions include (a) How do job coaches perceive this program? (b) How do the parents of the cadets perceive this program? (c) How does social theorist Erving Goffman’s ideas on stigma apply to the parents and cadets in this program?

Through these semi-structured interviews with the parents and job coaches, questions are asked to further understand *stigma*: the major sociological concept used in this study. This focus on stigma is driven by research on social distance that consistently documents that *individuals with intellectual disabilities are found to be the most undesirable group in society* (Scior, Connolly, and Williams 2013). For symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman (1963: 3), stigma is constructed by members of society who evaluate others as inferior, based on “undesirable attributes.” This social construction of stigma relates to the exceedingly low employment rates for young adults with intellectual disabilities, and it is pertinent to find out how stigma affects their daily lives. By interviewing the job coaches and

parents, this study seeks to uncover the effects of stigma, and also if this law enforcement program has been able to reduce it.

According to psychologist and social worker Eddie Gallagher (2002:203), “a wheelchair user is handicapped by stairs, narrow doors, high kerbs, and poorly designed wheelchairs, [while] *someone with an intellectual limitation is handicapped by the complexity of society.*” These words epitomize this study’s importance, and exemplify how having an intellectual disability in today’s society results in personal troubles that are connected to wider public issues. While these individuals have personal troubles such as not being able to fit in or find a job, societal issues continue to oppress this group. For instance, public misconceptions (such as the belief that the majority of individuals with disabilities are unable to successfully maintain a job) are rampant, and are fueled by stigma due to these individuals’ perceived lack of normality and intelligence (Burke et al. 2013). While Peter Berger states that sociology is distinguished from other disciplines by “the curiosity that grips any sociologist in front of a closed door behind which there are human voices,” studying the voices that are often considered outsiders of our society is sociologically relevant (Matson 2008: 5). Most importantly, in a discipline that strives to understand stigma and all sectors of the population, allowing the families and individuals impacted by disabilities to share their views and opinions is beneficial.

Literature Review

Employment Context for Young Adults with Disabilities

While 70% of young adults with intellectual disabilities are unemployed, two-thirds of those who are not working *desire* to have a job (Hunter and Storey 2014; McDonough and Revell 2010). Furthermore, the examination of employers’ attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities suggests that it is not the individuals’ impairments that deny them entry into the workforce, but society itself (McDonough and Revell 2010). After analyzing thirty-four research studies from 1987-2012, Burke et al. (2013) illustrate discriminatory hiring practices of employers towards individuals with disabilities.

Commonly held misperceptions and negative attitudes of employers also hinder their chances of becoming hired. These misperceptions and attitudes include concern about safety and accommodations, as well as the belief that individuals with disabilities will call in sick more often, and will struggle to get along with co-workers (Burke et al. 2013). Overall, while employers think positively of those with disabilities in general, their prejudicial hiring practices stem from their lack of knowledge on disabilities (Burke et al. 2013, Hunter and Storey 2014). In order to reduce the negative stigma surrounding young adults with disabilities, integration into the community through meaningful and non-stereotypical jobs has been found to be successful. Additionally, this integration will allow employers and the wider community to see these individuals as competent members of the community, rather than perceived as outsiders (Hunter and Storey 2014).

Community Programs and the Role of Job Coaches

Community programs pair young adults with disabilities with workplaces where they can engage in job related tasks, socially interact with co-workers, and gain real-world experience. Successful community programs rest on the premise that “there is a qualitative difference between *being present* in a community and *having a presence* in a community” (Carter et al. 2013: 893). Hence, in order for these programs to thrive, important roles and jobs should be given so that these young adults will feel like valued members of the community (Carter et al. 2013). Other key components of community programs include empowering these individuals to make their own decisions on the job, providing job tasks that build off of their interests, and including their families (Carter et al. 2013). However, the most common key component noted throughout the literature is providing onsite job coaches who “in addition to teaching employment skills, encourages social, affective, and communication behaviors within job tasks and workplace situations” (Burke et al. 2013; Carter et al. 2013; D’Agostino and Cascella 2008: 552; Hunter and Storey 2014; McDonough and Revell 2010; Shearn, Beyer, and Felce 2000).

When supported by job coaches, community programs have evidenced positive outcomes for young adults with disabilities (e.g. McDonough and Revell 2010; Shearn et al. 2000). For example, in a case study of nine young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder who participated in a two-year program that provided job preparation, placement, and coaching, 77% were able to successfully hold their original job throughout the entirety of the program (McDonough and Revell 2010). Additionally, one case study of a community program located within an animal shelter focused on a twenty-two year old autistic male who greeted patrons, took care of dogs, and cleaned the facility (McDonough and Revell 2010). By recognizing his interests in interacting with people, being active, and learning through visual and verbal instructions, this job coach was able to pair his client's interests and modalities to his job tasks at the animal shelter, resulting in a successful experience (McDonough and Revell 2010).

Through observation research comparing the experiences between participants of a special needs day center, and participants in a community program with supported employment, Shearn et al. (2000) also demonstrate the benefits of job coaches. While job coaches were more expensive to pay than the day center employees, the young adults in the community programs had higher levels of task-related engagement (40% as compared to the day center's 24%), as well as higher levels of social contact from co-workers and community members (12% as compared to the day center's 0%) (Shearn et al. 2000). Overall, by providing these young adults with a job coach in work settings that provide meaningful tasks and interactions, their employability increases along with their ability to manage and adapt to workplace demands (Burke et al. 2013; McDonough and Revell 2010; Shearn et al. 2000).

Including Perceptions of Parents and Job Coaches

Previous research on community programs makes the distinction between *meaningful* programs and programs that are mediocre (Carter et al. 2013, Storey and Hunter 2014, Rossetti et al. 2015). Through evaluation research, the meaningful programs produce higher self-esteem and determination, develop leadership skills, and provide genuine friendships and social networks, thus empowering young

adults with disabilities (Carter et al. 2013; Hunter and Storey 2014). However, Rossetti et al. (2015:4) propose that the perceptions of these community programs *must* be heard from the parents and job coaches who are “intimately involved in and directly affected by the process and outcomes of the transition to adulthood for their children” with disabilities. Unfortunately, these experiences are often left out of the research (Rossetti et al. 2015). The current study seeks to fill this void by allowing job coaches and parents to express their opinions on a *specific* program. Further, Rossetti et al.’s (2015) study provides these imperative perspectives that bring insight on the criteria of *meaningful* programs.

In a qualitative study of semi-structured interviews with 23 parents and 2 job coaches (n=5), participants were asked to describe a typical week for their adult child with disabilities (Rossetti et al. 2015). As a result, the majority of young adults with disabilities were found to spend most of their days in day centers, as well as engaging in volunteer work in their community (Rossetti et al. 2015). While day centers that estranged these young adults from community participation were considered mediocre, parents and job coaches emphasized the importance of a variety of job experiences that allowed these individuals to navigate the real demands of work in the community (such as the program that the current study seeks to evaluate) (Rossetti et al. 2015). According to one parent, “You have to keep the kids active. But in doing so, you also have to keep them out in the real world. I didn’t want them to be in a center every Friday doing the same thing every week” (Rossetti et al. 2015: 9). Additionally, (a) interest-based programs that pave the way for paid employment, (b) allow for greater community presence and engagement in normal activities, and (c) provide job coaches who genuinely love their child, are considered to be *meaningful*. Epitomizing the success of community programs, one job coach illustrates the change that he saw in one of his clients:

“Before I got here Ben’s parents said Ben was just low-key, he seemed bored in life. So I worked with the team and we really have busted our butts to get him out there, and they say Ben is totally different in the last two-and-a-half years. You know, he’s just happy. He’s more alert and attentive. He listens. He’s living life. Smiling. I mean the most important thing, I think, is because of all the things that we do. That’s meaningful to him. I mean, he has a life now!” (Rossetti et al. 2015: 11).

While these parents and job coaches advocate for their children to be placed in top quality, meaningful community programs, they are constantly met with challenges that often forestall their efforts (Rossetti et al. 2015).

Role of Parents: Combatting Stigma

Compounding the macro-structural inequalities (e.g. the low accessibility of effective community programs), research consistently finds that parents of children with disabilities also have to combat *stigma* (Ankeny et al. 2009; Burke et al. 2013; Gray 1993; Rossetti et al. 2015; Zibricky 2014). Dating back to pioneering research conducted on the relationship between disability and stigma, Gray (1993) asserts that 29 out of 32 parents with autistic children, report having experienced stigma in interviews. The majority of these parents isolated themselves and their disabled children from social contact with the public, as a result of constant ridicule and stigma (Gray 1993). This trend of stigma extends into the current research, where parents of young adults with disabilities strive to normalize their children with hopes of avoiding stigmatization (Zibricky 2015; Ankeny 2009). In an autoethnography of her experiences of raising a son with autism, Zibricky (2015: 43) states that she “wanted society to value [her son] and trying to make him normal was the only way [she] felt they would.” Additionally, in a case study of four mothers with children with varying disabilities, the mothers felt the need to *protect* their children from stigma, however struggled themselves to grasp the fact that their daughters would never be able to date and potentially marry like other *normal* teenage girls (Ankeny 2009: 32).

Expanding the stigma that is directed towards young adults with disabilities, stigma is also directed towards the parents of these individuals (Gray 1993; Zibricky 2014). According to Gray (1993: 102), “any form of chronic illness represents a serious challenge, not only to the afflicted individual, but also to the individual’s family.” Due to this perception of stigma, parents often feel as if they gain a master status in which they are seen only as a parent with a disabled child (Gray 1993; Zibricky 2014).

Zibricky (2014:40) contends, “as motherhood and disability intersect, mothers raising disabled children are swept to the margins of society.” Hence, while striving to provide the most advantageous opportunities for their disabled child towards leading a meaningful life as an adult, stigma is a constant barrier to combat.

Overall, by understanding the discriminatory hiring practices of employers, identifying the components of meaningful programs and the effectiveness of job coaches, and evaluating the effects of stigma for parents with disabled children, *it is apparent that the opportunities for young adults with disabilities is deficient* (e.g. Burke et al. 2013; Rossetti et al. 2015; Zibricky 2014). Also evident in the literature is the need to include the perspectives of job coaches and parents of young adults with disabilities (D’Agostino et al. 2008; Rossettii et al. 2015). Thus, in order to fully evaluate the first law enforcement program for young adults with disabilities, the voices of their job coaches and parents will be heard.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The sociological theory *symbolic interactionism* emphasizes how individuals make meaning of their lives through daily social interactions with other members of society (Bannister 2015). From this theoretical standpoint, attention to micro-level interactions between humans is essential. For instance, a symbolic interactionist would study how individuals in society react to different social settings and individuals, and also how they use the information gleaned from others to modify their self-presentation (Dillon 2010). While these theorists are driven by an analytical lens which focuses on “small-scale, individual, face-to-face, and small group interaction,” the recognition that these *micro*-level interactions have *macro*-level ramifications is paramount (Dillon 2010: 503).

Erving Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma exemplifies how negative interactions and perceptions among members of society can produce structural inequality for individuals who differ from the norm. According to Goffman (1963:3), stigma is a *social construction*, whereby individuals are evaluated as

inferior based on “undesirable attributes.” As a result, Goffman claims that society begins to see the stigmatized person as non-human, which forces the stigmatized individual to “suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament” (1963:127) . Because the stigmatized person deviates from what is socially constructed and accepted as normal, Goffman emphasizes that with societal discrimination, their life chances and aspirations are reduced (Goffman 1963). Hence, by understanding the theoretical assumptions and propositions of Goffman on stigma, it becomes clear as to why individuals with various disabilities struggle to be accepted and find employment.

For Goffman, there is a distinction between individuals who are *discreditable* or *discredited* by their stigma, which differs based on their outward appearances towards others, and how concealable their stigmatizing attributes are (1963). Goffman states, “when an individual’s stigma is very visible, his merely contacting others will cause his stigma to be known about” (1963: 49). For example, in the realm of disability, individuals with Down syndrome would often experience greater stigma than individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Chaudoir, Earnshaw, and Andel 2013). This stigma variation occurs because individuals with Down syndrome typically have more difficulty concealing their stigma due to the stereotypical facial and body features associated with the disability, thus considered as being *discredited* by their stigma (Chaudoir et al. 2013, Goffman 1963). On the other hand, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder can often pass as normal due to the lack of outward visibility of their disability, therefore [to Goffman] having a *discreditable* stigma (Chaudoir et al. 2013, Goffman 1963).

In addition to his focus on how stigma impacts the individual, Goffman also emphasizes how stigma affects those who have relationships with individuals who are seen to have “undesirable attributes” (Goffman 1963:3). He contends that individuals who are “related through the social structure to a stigmatized individual. . . leads to the wider society to treat both individuals in some respect as one” (Goffman 1963:30). This type of stigmatization that falls on individuals who have close relationships

with stigmatized individuals is defined by Goffman as “courtesy stigma” (Goffman 1963:30). Further, Goffman notes that because being close to stigmatized individuals carries stigma onto the *normal* individual, this is why relationships as such are often broken and temporary (Goffman 1963). However, this severance of ties is unfathomable for parents whose children have disabilities, therefore they are known to undergo stigma based on their parenting styles, ability to handle their child, etc. (Gray 1993; Zibricky 2014).

Most importantly, by understanding how stigma affects individuals with disabilities, their parents, and the wider society, the current study seeks to gain the viewpoints and perspectives of parents with young adults with disabilities, as well as these individuals’ job coaches. Through semi-structured interviews, questions will be asked to evaluate the community program that their children were a part of. Additionally, these interviews will seek to gain insight into how stigma affects their lives (See Appendices A & B for Interview Questions). For instance, when interviewing the parents, questions were asked such as, “how would you explain your experience of having a young adult with special needs?” In addition, follow-up questions were also asked, including “have you experienced stigma?” and “has the [community program your child was a part of] reduced this stigma?” Open-ended questions that did not specifically ask about stigma, had the potential for stigma to be addressed, such as asking, “what was your child’s experience after the special education process ended in high school (paid employment, volunteer work, community participation, etc.), and what was your role in this process?.”

In the semi-structured interviews with the job coaches, questions were asked such as, “from your experience as a job coach, how would you explain the experience of having a disability in today’s society?” Follow-up with questions were then asked including, (a) “Do you see that individuals with special needs are stigmatized in society?” (b) “Is this stigma apparent to the cadets?” and (c) “If so, has the [community program] reduced this stigma?” Overall, while Goffman’s theory directly influenced the

types of questions asked to the study's participants, the following hypotheses were theoretically driven as well:

1. Parents perceive themselves to be affected by stigma as a result of having a disabled child.
2. Parents of young adults with disabilities perceive their disabled children to be stigmatized.
3. Parents of young adults with disabilities will report that this community program will reduce the amount of stigma associated with their child within the police department and the wider community.
4. Job coaches of young adults with disabilities will report that this community program will reduce the amount of stigma associated with their client within the police department and the wider community.
5. Parents will perceive this community program as a beneficial program in preparing young adults with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community.
6. Job coaches will perceive this community program as a beneficial program in preparing young adults with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community.

Methods

Sample

This current study was qualitative and exploratory, and focused on the perspectives of the parents and job coaches of the young adults with disabilities whom were participants in a law enforcement community program. While previous research gained the perspectives of the 5 cadets (ages 18-25) with disabilities, along with the program coordinator, broadening the sample to include various viewpoints was essential. Hence, purposive sampling was used for this study. Although the sample size was small (n=9), obtaining the perceptions of the parents and job coaches of this pioneering law enforcement program is worthy of investigation due to their unique lived experiences with a child/client with disabilities, along with their involvement with the program. To obtain access to the sample, contact was made with the program director and one of the job coaches, of whom connections were made during the previous research conducted at the police department in the summer of 2015. Contact information was obtained for all five of the cadets' parents, as well as the other two job coaches who worked with the cadets. Through numerous text messages, emails, and phone calls, semi-structured interviews were set up with each of the five sets of parents and three job coaches.

While the three job coaches were invited to participate, along with nine parents¹ of the five cadets, a total of six Caucasian females and three Caucasian males participated in this research study (n=9). Out of the three job coaches², two participated (one Caucasian male and one Caucasian female), and out of the nine parents, seven parents participated. At least one parent of each of the five cadets participated in the study. The interviews were conducted in the fall of 2015 in multiple surrounding counties and cities in the United States within the vicinity of the law enforcement program that the participant's child/client were a part of.

Confidentiality

Due to the study's participants being directly tied to a vulnerable population, small sample size, and the uniqueness of the program, several steps were taken to maintain confidentiality. First, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained after submitting a proposal that ensured ethical competency in studying human participants, and attention to the risks and confidentiality of the participants. However, given the nature of the semi-structured interview questions, there were minimal to no risks connected with the research procedures (See Appendices A & B for List of Questions). No questions were asked related to the parents' or job coaches' criminal or illegal activity, morals, values, or sexuality. Additionally, each parent and cadet signed a consent form before any data was gathered (See Appendix C for Consent Form). This consent form described information on the purposes, procedures, risks, benefits, data collection and storage, and contact information of the IRB director and faculty advisor. This form also explained that all information regarding their identity, the program's identity, and their child's identity would be kept confidential. The participants were also assured that

¹ While contact was made with the mother of the cadets in each instance, the father of the cadet was asked to participate as well (besides one case where it was known that one of the fathers had passed away).

² After contact was made to one of the job coaches and agreement was confirmed for participation, upon waiting to schedule the interview, information was gained that parents were concerned with this research including an interview with one specific job coach. Thus, in order to maintain the established rapport with the parents, the decision was made as a researcher to discontinue pursuing this job coach.

the data would be recorded without identifying information, such as stating specific disabilities linked to any individual. By signing the consent form, the job coaches and parents agreed that (1) the study involved gaining their perceptions on the program that their child/client was involved in, (2) their participation was voluntary, and (3) if they did participate, they could withdraw themselves and/or any data they provided from the study at any time without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, the name of the program, as well as the name and location of the police department was not included in the interview findings, along with the names of the job coaches and parents. As noted in Table 1, each set of parents was assigned a number (1-5), with “a” indicating a mother, and “b” indicating a father. The two job coaches were also assigned a number (“Job Coach 1” and “Job Coach 2”). Due to only one male and one female job coach participating in this study, the pronouns they/their/them (instead of he/she, him/her) will be used in the results section in order maintain confidentiality of the job coaches’ identities.

Table 1: Parent Participants and Codes to Maintain Confidentiality

	Cadet 1	Cadet 2	Cadet 3	Cadet 4	Cadet 5
<i>Parent Participant</i>	Parent 1a	Parent 2a	Parent 3a	Parent 4a	Parent 5a
<i>Parent Participant</i>	Parent 1b				Parent 5b

Measures

Over the course of two weeks, seven interviews were conducted, with two interviews consisting of both parents of a cadet. Due to convenience and distance between one participant’s home, one phone interview was conducted. Five interviews took place in public locations (restaurants, coffee shops, etc.), and one interview was conducted in a relative of the participant’s home. While a different semi-structured interview schedule was created for the parents and the job coaches, both were focused on obtaining their views of the program, as well as how stigma impacts their own and their child/client’s lives. Each of these seven semi-structured interviews ranged from lasting approximately 30 minutes to an hour, and varied based on the flow of conversation among the participants. Questions sought to

determine whether (a) the parents perceived themselves and their child to be affected by stigma, (b) that the program could reduce this stigma between individuals with disabilities and the police officers and the wider community, and (3) that this program is beneficial in preparing individuals with disabilities for productive and meaningful lives in their community.

While the length of the interviews varied slightly between the job coaches and parents, the types of questions differed. For instance, the interviews with the parents asked about eight questions on their introduction to the program, their transitional experience after their child graduated high school, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and how stigma has affected/affects their and their child's lives (See Appendix A for the Parent Interview Questions). The interviews with the two job coaches focused on their job description and roles, the strengths and weaknesses of the program, what changes they saw in their clients, and their experience with stigma with their clients (See Appendix B for the Job Coach Interview Questions).

Analysis

Due to this study's inductive, exploratory, and qualitative approach, interview questions were purposely open-ended and shaped by the study's participants. During the interviews, answers were recorded verbatim with pen and paper resulting in approximately 20 pages of field notes. After the interviews took place, the field notes were scrutinized and read multiple times in order to find patterns, trends, and relationships among answers. As detailed in the results section, three trends emerged from the interviews with the job coaches: (a) life of a job coach, (b) strengths and weaknesses of the law enforcement community program, and (c) their perception of stigma for those with disabilities. The second section of the results section details the findings from the interviews with the parents of the five cadets. For the purposes of clarity in the results sections, the parents will be regarded as a "set" of

parents, even if only one parent was interviewed.³ These findings will be divided into three sections: (a) from school to the program, (b) parent evaluation of the program, and (c) the experience of stigma.

Results

I. *Interview Findings with Job Coaches⁴*

Life of a Job Coach

Both job coaches were employed by a company that seeks to rehabilitate and provide vocational training and support for individuals with varying disabilities. In this role, both have worked with at least one cadet in the law enforcement program. Upon asking these job coaches what made them want to work with young adults with special needs, job coach 1 responded that they had graduated with a degree in special education and “had a background in working with individuals with disabilities.” Job coach 2 noted that a friend told them that he thought they would really like being a job coach, but that they were also “raised that you help people. . . raised in that culture,” and that it comes “natural.” Both job coaches work in the public service sector in addition to their time as a job coach, with job coach 1 desiring to work “every day I am off” as a job coach.

Job coach 2 explained their role as “assisting adults with barriers of some sort, in learning job skills, learning job behaviors, how to keep a job, and apply for a job.” Job Coach 2 also noted that “ensuring long term success is important,” and making sure that the individual with a disability and the job that they engage in is “a good fit.” Job coach 1 noted that they worked with individuals with disabilities at job sites, and that they would “check on them and the employer.” Currently, job coach 2

³ For instance, while 7 parents in total were interviewed (with only both parents present in two interviews), if all parents in the sample agreed on a certain area, it will be noted as “five out of the five sets of parents agreed...” This choice was made due to the 100% agreement between the two mothers and fathers with whom a joint interview was conducted.

⁴ Recall that due to only one male and one female job coach participating in this study, the pronouns they/their/them (instead of he/she, him/her) will be used in the results section. Lack of grammatical clarity is recognized, however this decision was made in order to maintain confidentiality of the job coaches’ identities. Due to this change in pronouns, it is important to recall that the interviews between the two job coaches were conducted separately.

oversees about 12 individuals with disabilities on the job in various places of business. Overall, it is important to understand that while these individuals are employed by the same company, they have other clients with disabilities that are not involved in the law enforcement program.

As far as their roles and tasks on a typical day working with the cadets, the two job coaches responses varied. Job coach 2 depicted their role in the program as, “starting the day by meeting with the client, going to different stations, figuring out what needs to be done. For example, shredding, sorting of finger prints, playing McGruff.” Job coach 2 continued by stating that their role as a job coach in the law enforcement program was “one big teaching moment” that helped the cadets with job skills. For instance, job coach 2 recalled how one of the cadets wanted to shred only one page of paper at a time at the police department, and that they had to “model” for that cadet that this method would take too long. On the other hand, job coach 1 explained that they offered support, encouragement, and guidance, however these roles “depends on the consumer [the cadets].” Most importantly, both job coaches agreed that the main goal of their work in the law enforcement program was to ensure further success of their clients (the cadets). Job coach 1 stated that, “the goal for any individual is to find them a job.” Job coach 2 also emphasized that their goals for the cadets that they worked with were to “develop skills, translate [the program] into real world work experience, and to have something to put on a resume . . . something as basic as they showed up every day [for work at the police department].”

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of the Law Enforcement Program

When asked, “from a job coach perspective, what are the strengths of the [name of program]?”, the two job coaches responses aligned:

Job Coach 1: “That’s a cool program! We just help that program, we’re a separate entity. It’s very unique and I give [the program director] a round of applause. It gives the cadets a quality of life, gets them up and about, gives them exercise and many don’t get that, positive support, teaches individuals in society how to work with those with disabilities too.” [When asked at the end of the interview if they had any last comments regarding the program]: “Very cool program, I’m kind of honored and excited to be a part of it. [Program director] worked extremely hard to get it started and where it’s heading. . . the first round of cadets have set the stage for more to come and all over this area it is expanding . . . it’s so positive, you want to be a part of it”

Job Coach 2: “Very structured, which is awesome . . . very nurturing environment. The cadets evolve and the police officers evolve. It is equally beneficial for both to interact. Job skills development is also a strength.”

In addition to the strengths of the programs, both job coaches emphasize the growth of the cadets when asked about the changes that they had seen in the cadets as they participated in this six month program:

Job Coach 1: “Oh lord, their attitude, their all-around health – most of them worked out – upbeat, ready to go, a lot more involved with everything . . . the cadets have come a long, long way. . . definitely grown tremendously.”

Job Coach 2: “At the start [of the program], I wasn’t involved. I was then assigned to [a cadet] who was personable and has been personable since before the program. However, I saw him develop as an employee” [When describing another cadet’s growth]: I saw [name of cadet] coming out of his shell. . . it’s really helpful for cadets.”

After the strengths of the program were expressed - with consistent perceptions between the two job coaches - their responses diverged upon discussing the weaknesses of the program. Job coach 1 did not comment on any weaknesses of the program, and emphasized that they did not see the program dissolving and that they “see it only getting bigger.” Job coach 1 also noted that the program director “has his head on straight and knows what he wants and wants to steer [the cadets] in the right direction.” Job coach 2 pointed out that since it was a new program, there “wasn’t a clear start and end date” of the program from the start. Thus, the cadets and their families “assumed that this was something they could do for a long time.” Job coach 2 also mentioned that some “thought automatically that they would have a job somewhere, which hasn’t happened for all of the cadets.” Job Coach 2 ended by stating that the program was a “fabulous program.”

Perceptions of Stigma

Upon asking the job coaches about their perceptions and experiences of stigma and how it affects their clients with disabilities, it became clear that stigma was perceived differently by the two job coaches:

Job Coach 1: “A lot of it [stigma] depends on where you are.” [When asked if they believed that the stigma was apparent to the cadets]: “For the most part, they have a good grasp on what other people view those with disabilities. A lot of parents we deal with are very proactive, and fight as any parent should for their child to receive any accommodations that he or she needs.

Job Coach 2: “I would definitely say that stigma is a problem. There are employers that have had not good experiences with employees with disabilities and job coaches. Once they get a bad taste in their mouth, they close their mind to individuals with disabilities. I often say, what if this was your sister or mom? If you don’t have any experience [with those with disabilities], you automatically make assumptions about this population. . . I once had a client who wasn’t called back for a second interview just because they had a job coach.” [When asked if they believed that the stigma was apparent to the cadets]: “I think that they see themselves just as you and I, and they should!”

Overall, both job coaches agreed that stigma is a societal issue that individuals with disabilities have to face. While one claimed that stigma depended on situational and geographical location, the other emphasized that stigma connected to individuals with disabilities is apparent everywhere. Most importantly, both job coaches agreed that the law enforcement program for individuals with disabilities has reduced the amount of stigma for these individuals within the police department, as well as in the wider community. Job coach 1 explains, “I have taken some to certain areas and jobs to apply, and of course not everybody understands them, but of course that’s their opinion. Once they get to know them, see them on a consistent basis, and see what these individuals are capable of, there is a light bulb that turns on. It’s really cool to see.” Job coach 1 also stated that this program shows that individuals with various disabilities are “actually capable of tons more, if people would just give them a chance.” Job coach 2 said that the program has reduced the amount of stigma, and exclaimed, “Definitely, hands down, especially among the police officers. They now use [one of the cadets] in city events, he is a great face for the [name of program]. People stop [the cadets] all the time and say ‘I saw you on TV!’”

II. Interview Findings with Parents

From School to the Program

Information was gathered regarding their child’s experience during school, after they graduated, and how their son or daughter gained entry into the law enforcement program. All of the parents

remarked on the lack of support and guidance during their children's school careers, especially after they graduated from high school. Three out of the five parents also expressed dissatisfaction with a specific organization⁵ that helps young adults with special needs gain job skills for future employment. Additionally, all of the parents heard about the law enforcement program through their personal friendships and professional connections within the fields of law enforcement and disability. When asked about their child's experience during school, and after graduation, the parents reported:

Parent 1a: "At age fifteen, IDEA [legislation on special education] says that you must talk about transition, but this did not happen at our IEP (Individualized Education Plan for individuals with special needs) meeting. I would like to change that. . . we need to work on fundamental goals of being employed. It hit us when he graduated. . . he doesn't have the employment skills. . . we didn't focus on them." [When asked about their role as parents in this transition process]: "We put a lot of pressure on [name of vocational placement organization for individuals with disabilities]. **Parent 1b:** "[The workers at this organization] don't do anything; they don't try because they don't have any expectations of the kids themselves."

Parent 2a: "All the way through school, through elementary school and middle school, he was in regular classes with a one on one aide. When he went to high school, he went to a self-contained special ed. class where he was pulled out for electives . . . After he graduated, I got him signed up with [name of vocational placement organization for individuals with disabilities], and he had one job assessment and that was it. We didn't hear back for months and months and months . . . it all fell on me. I didn't want to put him in a job without support. . . so I said 'heck with it.' [The parent then explained that she had to set him up with a volunteer opportunity in the community, as well as an organization where individuals with disabilities could interact with each other. After not hearing back from that aforementioned organization, she was attending an inclusion conference when she saw the man who she had filed out an application with from that organization]. "I said, 'did you forget about me'? And he said 'you fell through the cracks.'" After that I filled out paperwork again three times, and didn't see [aforementioned organization] until they decided to fund the [law enforcement program]. It's a shame that we have to fuss and fight. The state of [state's name] is not real good at continuing support after high school. It's like you're on your own!"

Parent 3a: "The school district placed him in this school for kids with [disabilities]. For many years, we wanted to get him back in the mainstream setting, but they were never willing to put all necessary support. . . it was easier for everyone involved to remain in this private special ed. setting . . . there are so many adults who slip through the cracks, the bottom drops out when educational entitlement ends and forces parents to reinvent the wheel to provide any appropriate program. . . It has taken all my efforts just to find those few supports. . . it's almost a full-time job building a life with [child's name]."

⁵ This organization will not be named in order to maintain confidentiality.

Parent 4a: “[name of aforementioned vocational placement organization] picked [child] up from elementary school – in first grade – and followed [child] all through high school. . . It took [child] three years for associates degree [in early childhood. . . then worked at [name of child care center] and [child] got that job on her own” [This parent then explained that her child began working at another place of employment with the help of a job coach, however was not given the proper accommodations needed and was treated unfairly. After this incident, her child worked in a public school before the law enforcement program, and continues this position presently].

Parent 5a: [In school], “it was an us versus them kind of situation. We wanted to work with the school but when they were doing something right, it would change.” **Parent 5b:** We had to fight for everything we got. . . the mold didn’t want to change for him, and he didn’t fit the mold.” [When asked about the transition from high school]: **Parent 5a:** “I was not satisfied with that. . . he didn’t have his age friends in his neighborhood. . . not a lot of physical activity . . . video games is all his life is.” [The parents then expressed to me that their child obtained a job *on his own*, but that the environment did not work for him. They then explained that their son had told [the aforementioned vocational placement organization] “three things he liked to do, but they did not do any” (**Parent 5b**). **Parent 5a:** “I tried everything I could to keep him in the community and get a job. . . he wants to live with us, but I know we won’t be around all the time. . . need to work on independent living skills. When I was told about [the program] I was crying tears of joy. It’s hard to get our kids involved . . . not a lot of opportunities out there.”

Parent Evaluation of the Law Enforcement Program

All five sets of parents were asked questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the law enforcement program that their child participated in, and how they perceived the program in preparing their child for future employment and community participation. All of the parents emphasized the strengths of the program, noting that the program gave their child a sense of purpose, greater self-esteem, and job skills. Additionally, multiple other positive comments were made about the program, and how the program was beneficial in preparing their children with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community:

Parent 1a: “Oh gosh, this [the program] is the best thing that he’s done. He has learned social skills – what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate – skill building, learned high expectations. The community gets to see them in a productive, well-behaved, well-mannered environment . . . the police officers get inadvertent training [on how to deal with those with disabilities.]” [When asked about the changes they have seen in their child as a result of the program]: “Self-worth, having a regular schedule, being a contributing member of society. . . learning job skills is a big one.” [The parents expressed that their son now volunteers one day a week at another police

department, is an assistant coach for his high school, and has a seasonal job with a sports facility].⁶

Parent 2a: “The notoriety that the cadets themselves got. . . gave people understanding . . . I don’t want people to say ‘hey! There is someone with [name of disability], I want him to be recognized as a cool guy.” [The program allowed for people to think that] “if this guy can work at the police department, they are capable of doing stuff at other places . . . gave job skills.” [When asked about the changes she has seen in her child as a result of the program]: “New self-esteem. When he put that uniform on he stood so tall and so proud. . . a sense of ownership. He enjoyed doing things in the community and being a part of that program. He was very proud of that position.” [This parent informed me that after graduating from the program, he received his dream job of working at a local grocery store].

Parent 3a: “Structure, training, overall community involvement, and interaction with police officers. [Child’s name] had an overall interest in law enforcement and this interest was reinforced by his participation in the program. When he started going [to the police department] from 7-9AM every morning, for just that alone – he was rarely late – was a pretty big learning curve for him to get himself up and get out the door – that himself gained a whole lot of skills and discipline.” [When asked about the changes that she had seen in her child as a result of the program]: “Overall, I see him initiating more conversations, his confidence has increased, and seems to be happy to manage his life – really helps with self-esteem.” [This parent informed me that her child continues to work at a local grocery store, takes Taekwondo lessons, takes a course at a community college, and also engages in social groups.]

Parent 4a: “[Child’s name] works in an environment with mostly older women. [Child] struggles with shyness and has three or four friends, two who are married . . . has no one to get out and have fun with and has limited social resources. [Child’s name] was ecstatic when they heard about the [name of law enforcement program]. [Child] loves the police department where [child’s] dad used to work. . . was proud to wear the uniform. . . Overall, it’s a good program. . . socially, it was really good. . . if you’re not socially fit, you cannot fit in in this world.” [When asked about the changes that she had seen in her child as a result of the program]: “[Child] looked forward to going every day and seeing everybody, now [child] is friends on Facebook with them, gives [child] a good feeling. . . [child] was proud of what they did there. . . [Child] really blossomed.” [Her child still continues to work part-time at a public school.]

Parent 5a: “Community service, training them to do practical jobs and training them to interact with the community, getting involved with those of authority. Also the reversal effect, [people think], ‘hey! They’re still people’ and makes them real.” **Parent 5b:** “[The program] gives [the cadets] a sense of purpose.” [When asked about the changes that they had seen in their child as a result of the program]: **Parent 5a:** “He’s learned how to suck it up and work.” [Their child continues to volunteer in law enforcement, and has a seasonal job at a sports facility].

⁶ Since this interview was conducted, this child has received another paid, part-time position at a fast food restaurant.

Four out of the five parents stated that one of the major (and for three parents, the only) weakness of the program was that it had to end, and that the ending was abrupt. Only one out of the five parents noted that the program may not have been a good fit for her child due to her child's specific barrier, however noted that she would recommend the program to other parents with children with disabilities. Overall, the *weaknesses* of the program were reported less than the strengths:

Parent 1a: "Transportation – we live in [name of county]. [Name of county] does not place importance on transportation for individuals with disabilities. Getting [child's name] from our house to the department as full-time working adults [was a barrier]. . .It's difficult getting [child] to understand he is not going to be in law enforcement. . . that's hard. . . gives a false sense of hope." **Parent 1b:** "he prays for it [to be a police officer] every night – he really wants that and he's really never going to get it." **Parent 1a:** "ending at six months is way negative and no one knew until five months and three and a half weeks that it would happen. It's not fair to them, but it's not [program director's] fault, there is limited funding through [name of aforementioned organization that helps with job placement for individuals with disabilities.]"

Parent 2a: "The only negative was that we didn't know sooner that it was going to end. People with [specific disability] have a tendency to not like change. [However, since graduation,] five guys from the police department came and watched [name of child] run track and the chief gave him his ribbon. [Name of child] had a sea of blue cheering squad. The friendships he had continued and trust me, they have his back!"

Parent 3a: "I can't really think of any. They made it extremely hard not to make a successful program for them. If any weakness, it was that they had to graduate. [Son's name] is still participating . . . still able and willing to go there every morning besides when he goes to college."

Parent 4a: "[Child's name] rides [name of public transportation for those with disabilities] a lot, and I would not put [child] on a bus with their uniform on for any amount of money [due to the societal animosity towards police]." Parent 4a expressed that one day, her daughter was "stopped on the sidewalk, and other officers who noticed had to come over to her . . . she didn't know how to handle the situation." Thus, Parent 4a took her child to and from the police department, which she considered a weakness. Parent 4a also stated that her child's "barriers are not as severe as the others [cadets], and that the program was really more for [name of specific disability]. [Child] felt resented, and one parent asked, 'exactly why are you in this program?'"

Parent 5a: "Only thing that I was concerned about was that [name of child] was with a lot of the fleet men, and I wondered 'what if someone pulls a gun on them?'" **Parent 5b:** "That didn't bother me. . . it's too soon to know what the weaknesses are. . . unless they get t-shirts in the summertime so they won't burn up in the heat. . . if [the program] stops working and they walk away without nothing, [the cadets] are friends now. They all get along, and think of themselves

as equal to all. . . as long as it doesn't get political [referring to local government political decisions] it [the program] will be fine."

Experience of Stigma

Towards the end of the interview, questions were asked regarding the experience of having a young adult with special needs and their experience with stigma. They were also asked if they perceived the law enforcement program to have the ability in reducing the amount of stigma for individuals with disabilities within the police department and the wider community. All of the parents recognized that stigma was prevalent among individuals with disabilities, however their responses varied on why they believed stigma occurred, and how they chose to deal with it. Additionally, four out of the five sets of parents believed that the law enforcement program reduced the stigma surrounding their child in the police department, as well as the wider community. Two sets of parents chose not to let stigma bother them, the other three attributed stigma to the lack of exposure and knowledge about disabilities, and one parent also noted that stigma is dependent on the location in which you live:

Parent 1a: "We have always just taken him everywhere with us. A lot of families do not. . . they're worried about how they will behave. **Parent 1b:** "When he was little, we would take him out to eat, and all someone would have to do is make eye contact and he will go to you and be your best friend. . . sometimes he had bad behavior." **Parent 1a:** "We taught ourselves how to block out the looks and whispering people, and don't let it bother us . . . not been an area that we have struggled with. We just don't really care." [When asked if they thought that the law enforcement program has reduced this stigma]: **Parent 1a:** "Absolutely, they're [the police department] the greatest advocates anyone will have." **Parent 1b:** "In his own little world, he is a superstar. . . people see him working hard – everyone knows how hard he works. I've had more people come to me and tell me that they are proud of [name of child]. Some people sit around and do nothing, and here's [name of child] who works three to four jobs a week." **Parent 1a:** "stigma is a lot better because the police department is who they are, now other communities have thought they can be much more willing to have disabled adults."

Parent 2a: [Before the main question was asked about stigma, Parent 2a noted stigma while discussing the strengths of the program]: "I had him in infant stimulation classes, and his doctor looked at me and said you can't take an IQ of 20 and bump it up to a 90. . . looked at him and said 'his mom will help him get him there'. . . they just want to toss you aside. . . he could sit at home and get a social security check, yes, but that's not what he wants, he wants to be in public." [When specifically asked about her experience with stigma]: "Oh yeah, people will say 'Oh I'm so sorry!' and I say 'for what?! I've got the best kid in the world.' The first thing is to feel

sorry for you. . . to see them and not really want to get to know them, people don't really know how to react to him being very personable. With his personality, it has gotten him so far. . . Growing up, other kids called him a retard, but they didn't do it around any of [name of child's] friends. [When asked if she thought that the law enforcement program has reduced this stigma]: "I think so, I really do. With the varied disabilities [in the program], people are thinking 'hmmmm, maybe we should do that'. . . all the cadets will be offered a job at [name of grocery store] after the program now. [Name of child] got his job before that. Now, you have business leaders rethinking this. . . giving adults with disabilities a chance, let them, see what they can do, don't look at them and make an assumption."

Parent 3a: [Before the main question was asked about stigma, Parent 3a noted stigma while discussing her child's current job]: "[Name of law enforcement program] is great, but there is a big difference in how he is embraced in [name of program] and in real life. [At his workplace at a grocery store,] they are not in the least bit interested in [name of child's] overall success. They don't get the big picture. . . they don't respect the fact that [name of child] is so socially awkward." [When specifically asked about her experience with stigma]: "I think there is a little bit of fear of the unknown with respect to [name of child] being considered with opportunities. When first working with [name of organization for vocational placement]. . . we were trying to get him a volunteer opportunity at a nursing home . . . and it took four months to get them to agree! WHY? Why was that? Can be because of the fear of the unknown. Sometimes [name of specific disability] is portrayed in the media and other mental health conditions as involved in major crimes [notation of the Sandy Hook school shooting with shooter with a disability]. There is now a big fear for people without knowledge of [name of specific disability]. . .so stigma? Absolutely!. . .I don't really feel any kind of stigma towards being a parent with [name of disability] son. I work in the field of [name of disability], it's my full-time job talking to parents all across the country and help them find supports. . . I'm really open and quickly educate people." [When asked if she thought that the law enforcement program has reduced this stigma]: "Absolutely, yes, I do. I think that the fact that it includes education and exposure of police officers to individuals [with specific disability] hugely, has a huge impact of their inclusion in the program. . . Those with [name of specific disability] are seven times more likely to have an unfortunate understanding with law enforcement. . . and to get exposure to kids with [name of specific disability], can be really really helpful."

Parent 4a: "We haven't had any issues with that [stigma]. [Name of school district] worked so wonderful with [child's name]. She's never been treated any differently. . .did have IEPs in school, and it was written in [child's] IEPs to leave class five minutes early. . . [name of child] wouldn't do it! [Child's name] didn't want to be looked at as any different."

Parent 5a: [When asked if they thought that the law enforcement program has reduced the stigma of young adults with disabilities]: "I think stigma has been reduced, but there is a long way to go, but it's helped. . . [name of child] looks normal . . . we just do what we do with our child and don't care about it [stigma]." **Parent 5b:** "Now, the less they are associated with the community, the more stigmatized they make themselves. . . now [the cadets] are associated with everybody . . . it aint him that's got the problem, its them." **Parent 5a:** "We've been stigmatized by other parents with those with special needs. . .they get bent out of shape because we taught [name of child] to say no, so when he would say no to other parents, they would get mad and look at us."

Discussion and Conclusions

Through the semi-structured interviews with the job coaches and parents of the cadets in this law enforcement program, it becomes clear that individuals with disabilities in society face a multitude of social and employment barriers. However, through these findings, programs such as the law enforcement community program for individuals with disabilities has the ability to reduce the stigma associated with these individuals, provide them with job and social skills, and allow them to feel like a meaningful member of their communities. Support was found for the first hypothesis that *parents perceive themselves to be affected by stigma as a result of having a disabled child*. Three out of the five sets of parents' responses were in agreement to this hypothesis. Additionally, four out of the five sets of parents *perceived their disabled child to be stigmatized*, by strangers, schoolmates, and employers, thus supporting the second hypothesis. Four out of the five sets of parents, and the two job coaches reported that *this community program reduced the amount of stigma associated with their child/client within the police department and the wider community*, providing support to the third and fourth hypotheses. Lastly, all five sets of parents and the two job coaches *perceived this community program as a beneficial program in preparing young adults with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community*, indicating strong support for the final two hypotheses.

This research was theoretically driven through a symbolic interactionist lens, which seeks to understand "small-scale, individual, face-to-face, and small group interaction," and how these micro-level interactions have macro-level ramifications (Dillon 2010: 503). As found in the interviews with the parents and job coaches, stigma is an interactional barrier for young adults with varying disabilities, which in turn affects their self-esteem, life chances, and employment opportunities. This finding supports Goffman's emphasis on the societal discrimination of those considered to have "undesirable attributes," and how stigmatized individuals "(such as those with disabilities) life chances and aspirations are reduced (1963: 3). Additionally, the degree of stigma varied for parents whose children had physical

outward appearances that were easily recognized to be a specific disability. Hence, this distinction based on visibility of disability exemplifies Goffman's distinction between individuals who are "discreditable" or "discredited" by their stigma. Parents whose children could "pass" as normal had less negative experiences with stigma themselves, along with their child being stigmatized less. Also, the three out of the five sets of parents embodied the impact of "courtesy stigma," in which the relationship with the stigmatized individual (their child) carries stigma onto the *normal* individual (the parents) (Goffman 1963).

According to Ankeny et al., the family is the "only consistent source of support for individuals with disabilities after they graduated high school" (2009: 30-31). Replicating this finding, all sets of parents expressed their constant fight and battle for the services provided to their sons or daughters before, during, and after their child has finished their school career. However, through their participation in the law enforcement community program, the parents perceived their child as benefitting socially and professionally. Carter et al. explain that in the few community programs world-wide, "there is a qualitative difference between *being present* in a community and *having a presence* in a community" (2013:893). It is clear that from this program the cadets *have a presence* in their community and police department, especially through the program equipping them with important roles, genuine relationships, and jobs that make them feel as if they are a valued member of their community (Carter et al. 2013). Most importantly, Rossetti et al. (2015:4) propose that the perceptions of these community programs *must* be heard from the parents and job coaches who are "intimately involved in and directly affected by the process and outcomes of the transition to adulthood for their children" with disabilities. Since these perspectives are often left out of the literature, this study has sought to fill the void (Rossetti et al. 2015).

This study's research technique of semi-structured interviews offered rich and detailed information from the individuals who are most intimately related to individuals with varying disabilities.

Triangulation was used to gain different perspectives from not only the parents of the cadets, but also the job coaches who work with them on this program. Additionally, due to the previous research conducted on the program through semi-structured interviews with the cadets and program director, and observational research, rapport with the families and the job coaches helped reduce the amount of non-participants, as well as the quality of information divulged in the interviews.

While this study offers a unique perspective, one limitation is that one of the job coaches was not interviewed. There was apparent tension between at least one of the parent participants and this job coach, therefore after being asked by the program director to not interview them, a decision was made to stop further pursuing this interview opportunity. However, due to the detailed information gathered from the other two job coaches, along with the parents, this omission does not reduce the reliability/validity of these findings. Additionally, while the small (n=9) purposive sample was chosen due to the uniqueness of the program and their intimate relationships with those with disabilities, it is problematic to generalize the findings to all families with individuals with disabilities. Further, unbeknownst at the time of sample selection, all five of the parents interviewed had strong social capital and connections to either the field of disability or law enforcement in their occupation or personal lives. Hence, for future research, gaining the perspectives of parents who are not as knowledgeable about the support that their child with disabilities are entitled to and need, and how to get these supports should be pursued. Gaining the perspectives of the police officers who interacted with the cadets in this program will also shed light on if the stigma between the cadets and the police officers has truly decreased. Lastly, tracking the cadets for longer periods of times to see if they are able to hold their jobs in the community should also be pursued in future research.

Through this exploratory research focused on perspectives of individuals in society who are stigmatized, the connection between personal troubles and public issues is elucidated. As stated by Eddie Gallagher, "a wheelchair user is handicapped by stairs, narrow doors, high kerbs, and poorly

designed wheelchairs, [while] someone with an intellectual limitation is handicapped by the complexity of society” (2002:203). Thus, the personal troubles that individuals with disabilities face are compounded by public misconceptions and stigma that oppress their life chances. Further, due to the perceived reduction of stigma and increased job skills and confidence among individuals with disabilities due to this law enforcement program, other public service departments and employers should be encouraged to adopt programs as such. To conclude, through this research on the views of parents and job coaches on a unique (and successful) community program, gaining future insights and information on lived-experiences of those who are often pushed to the margins of society is beneficial for the field of sociology, as well as society.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Parents)

Roanoke College IRB Study #I6SO017
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Parents

1. How did you hear of the program and how did you get your son or daughter involved with the program?
2. What was your child's experience after the special education process ended in high school (paid employment, volunteer work, community participation, etc.), and what was your role in this process?
3. From a parent's perspective, what are the strengths of the program?
 - a. What skills/valuable experiences/relationships did your son or daughter build due to their participation in the program?
4. From a parent's perspective, what are the weaknesses of the program (transportation, etc.)?
5. What changes did you see in your son or daughter as they participated in this program?
6. After graduating from the program over the summer, what has your son or daughter been involved in?
7. Aside from the program, how would you explain your experience of having a young adult with special needs?
 - a. Have you experienced stigma?
 - b. Has the program reduced this stigma?
8. Do you have any last comments regarding the program?

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Job Coaches)

Roanoke College IRB Study #16SO017
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Job Coaches

1. What is your job description as a job coach?
 - a. Who are you employed by? How many hours do you work with the cadets? How do you get assigned to individual cadets? What are other locations you have worked at with young adults with special needs?
2. What made you want to work with young adults with special needs?
3. As a job coach, describe your role (or roles) and tasks on a typical day at the police department with your cadets.
4. What are your goals for your cadets in this program?
5. From a job coach perspective, what are the strengths of the program?
 - a. What skills/valuable experiences/relationships do the cadets build due to their participation in the program?
6. From a job coach perspective, what are the weaknesses of the program (transportation, funding, etc.)?
 - a. Do you foresee your participation in this program dissolving in the future, or the program itself dissolving?
7. What changes do you see in the cadets as they participate(d) in this program?
8. From your experience as a job coach, how would you explain the experience of having a disability in today's society?
 - a. Do you see that individuals with special needs are stigmatized in society?
 - b. Is this stigma apparent to the cadets?
 - c. If so, has the program reduced this stigma?
9. Do you have any last comments regarding the program?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Roanoke College **IRB Study #16SO017**
Informed Consent Form (Parents/Job Coaches)

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to examine the effectiveness of [name of program] in preparing young adults with disabilities towards meaningful and productive lives in their community, as perceived through the eyes of parents and job coaches. Data and results gathered from interviews will be analyzed and synthesized in my final paper that is needed for my Senior Seminar Course in Sociology at Roanoke College.

Procedures:

There will be two types of research conducted in this study. Evaluation research will be conducted by studying the program itself and researching other similar programs like the [name of program]. I will also be conducting interviews with job coaches, and with parents whose children have graduated from the [name of program].

Risks, Benefits, & Compensation:

The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than you would experience in regular daily activities. There will be no personal questions about illegal behavior, morals, etc. asked. The interview questions focus on your perceptions and opinions of the program, so minimal to no risks will be involved.

Data Collection and Storage:

All information regarding your identity, the program's identity, and your child's identity will be confidential. Data will be recorded without identifiers, yet with pseudonyms. A pseudonym will be used in the place of your names, without the use of any identifying information, such as stating specific disabilities, etc. When writing about the program, I will not state the name of the program or the name of the police department (e.g. a program for young adults with disabilities conducted by a police department in Virginia). No code list or notes will be kept. Consent forms will be kept separately; therefore, there will be no way of connecting participants' identities with their interview responses.

Contact information:

For other questions about the study, you should contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kristi Hoffman at the Department of Sociology, Roanoke College, Salem, VA 24153 or by phone (540-375-2027) or E-Mail (khoffman@roanoke.edu). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, you may contact the office for the Institutional Review Board, Roanoke College, Trout 112, Salem, Virginia 24153, 540-375-2409, by e-mail at irb@roanoke.edu.

Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent Statement:

I have read and understand the study described above. I am 18 years of age or older and I freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw myself and/or any data I provide from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____