

## Workplace Reactions toward Employees with Intellectual Disability: *Shifting from Stigma to Acceptance*

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# Purpose



**To share experiences from Project SEARCH  
NIH and a research study on workplace  
stigma toward employees with intellectual  
disability.**

*Project SEARCH represents a significant workplace inclusion strategy!*



**An innovative school-to-work transition program that provides workplace training and hiring opportunities to young adults with intellectual disabilities**

# How does the program work?



# Program Overview



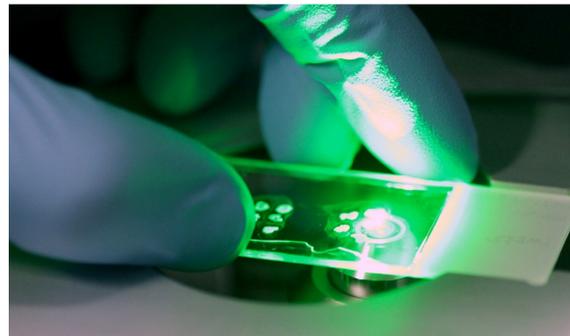
- 30 week unpaid internship
- 3 ten-week rotations
- Interns are matched to worksites based on skill and environmental tolerances
- Monday-Friday: 1 hour classroom/5 hours worksite immersion

## GOAL:

To generate an untapped recruitment stream for NIH and to secure paid employment outcomes for each intern

# Aligns with NIH Mission

NIH's mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.



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# Articulating Business Goals



- Viewing host sites as vital partners in school-to-work transition planning, a workforce management goal
- Identifying important work that needs to be done
- Re-engineering the work so it can be accomplished
- Finding willing internal partners
- Understanding the value equation
- Managing organizational change

# Examples of Assignments



- Data entry & database management
- Supply management
- Information technology
- Patient bar-coding
- Hand hygiene
- Hospitality
- Medication Delivery
- OR instrument sterilization
- Linen delivery and inventory automation

# Initiating Partnerships



# Inviting Coworker Input



- Pay attention to factors that affect workplace assimilation
- Perceptions of fairness of and expense of accommodations
- Other judgments about disabled employees
- Supervisory round tables

# Ingredients for Success



- Collaboration across organizational boundaries
- Strong internal project manager
- Leadership support
- Employee accountability
- Coworker acceptance
- Continual learning
- Communication plan



# Outcomes



Project SEARCH  
NIH

	Year 1 2010	Year 2 2011	Year 3 2012	Year 4 2013	Year 5 2014	Year 6 2015	Year 7 2016	Year 8 2017	Overall
Interns Graduated	11	10	10	12	10	11	8	8	80
Graduates Hired at NIH	8	5	7	8	8	6	3	2	47/80 59% Hire Rate
NIH Hires Still Employed	5/8	4/5	6/7	8/8	8/8	6/6	3/3	2/2*	42/47 89% Sustainability Rate

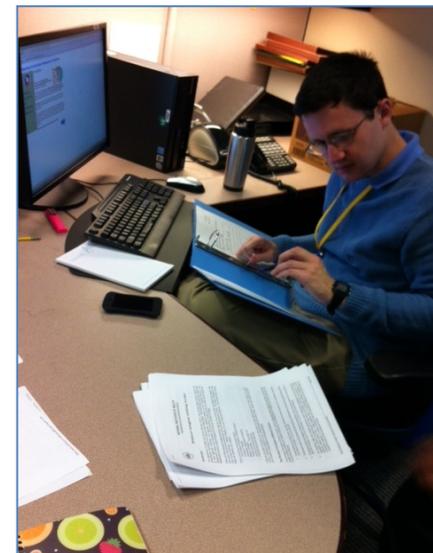
*\*Hires to date. Data collection will  
be completed by May 2019*

# Key Lesson Learned



## *A Reasonable Accommodation Approach*

- Intellectual Functioning
- Social Adaptation



# Noticing the Shift in Attitudes

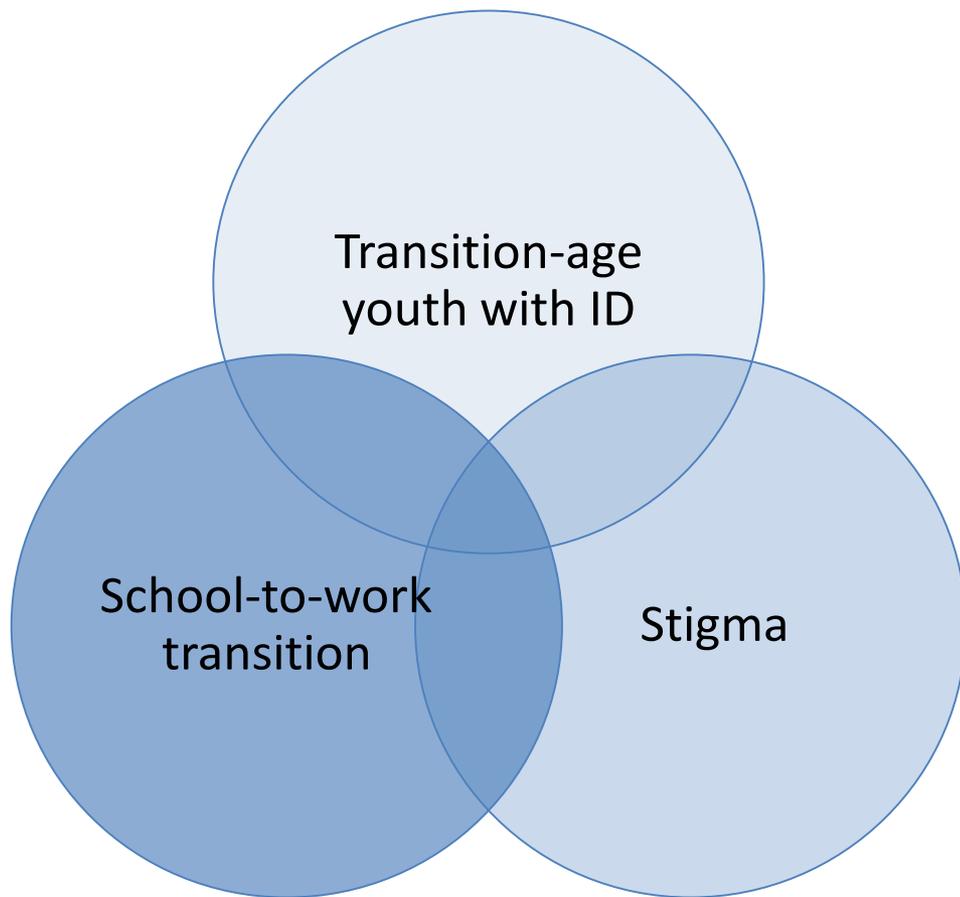
## Personal Observation

The youth with ID were a challenge to place but once in the work unit met with success and acceptance.

## Qualitative Research Study

Explored workplace stigma toward employees with ID as assessed through coworker perceptions over time.

# Conceptual Framework



## Research Question

In what ways do coworkers describe their perceptions over time of transition-age youth with ID hired in a coworkers' unit within the context of a formalized, school-to-work transition program?

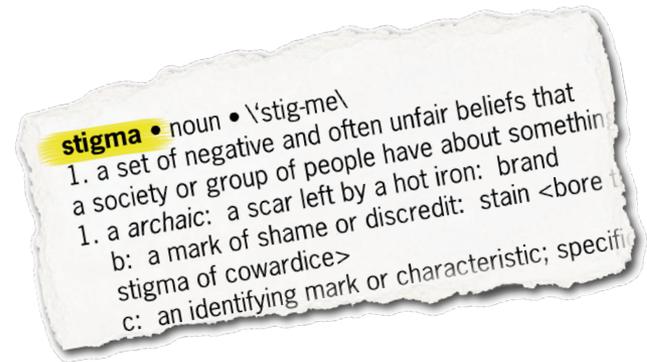
# Transition-Age Youth

- 30% lower national employment rate for individuals with disabilities (Kesler Foundation/National Organization on Disability, 2010)
- Employment gaps most problematic for transition-age youth (18-21) with intellectual disabilities (Butterworth, Smith, Hall, Migliore, & Winsor, 2010)
- Transition activities include:
  - completing secondary education
  - obtaining meaningful employment
  - gaining financial independence
  - making autonomous decisions



# Understanding Stigma

Prevailing beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors about the employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities



## PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS

**Goffman (1963)** – individuals or groups are treated differently because they are perceived to embody certain undesirable differences or characteristics which may result in prejudice and reinforced inequalities

# Data Collection Instrument

## Interview Questions

### Three subsections by time frame of coworker perception:

- 1) Prior perceptions – what coworkers anticipated it would be like to work with an individual with ID prior to the youth joining the work unit;
- 2) Perceptions during transition – coworkers' perceptions of the youth during the time in which the individual first arrived in the work unit as an intern through the first year as a new hire; and,
- 3) Current perceptions – coworkers' perceptions after having worked with the youth for at least one year.

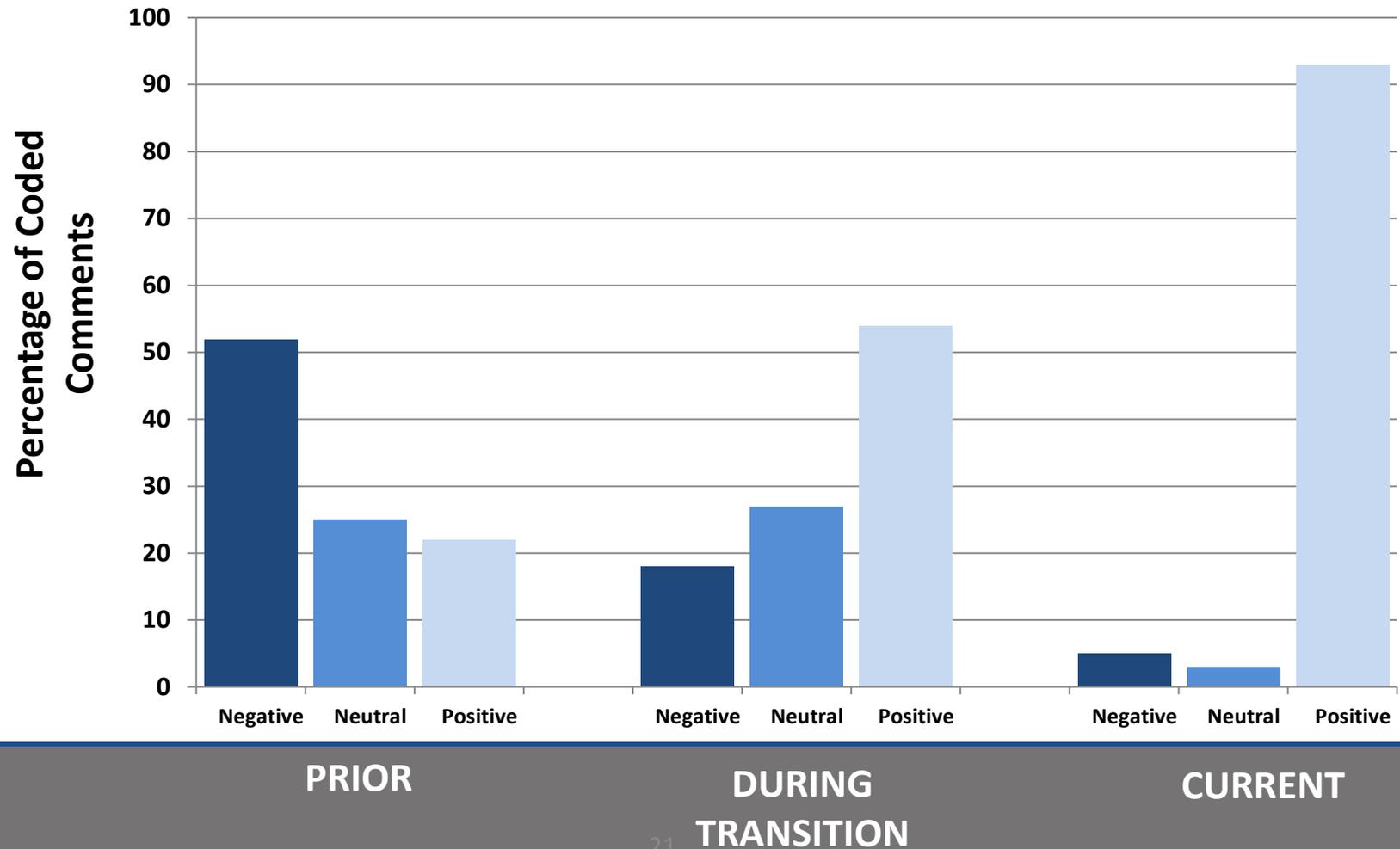
# Findings

## Coworker Perceptions Shifted over Time

<i><b>Prior</b></i>	<i><b>During Transition</b></i>	<i><b>Current</b></i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Concern over time burden</i></li><li>• <i>Skepticism of ability</i></li><li>• <i>Overall low expectations</i></li><li>• <i>Concerned about acceptance</i></li><li>• <i>Privileged, humbled, excited</i></li><li>• <i>Uncertainty related to mentoring ability</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Shyness, fear, and anxiety</i></li><li>• <i>Growing self-confidence</i></li><li>• <i>Increasing proficiency in job skills</i></li><li>• <i>Emerging acceptance</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Contributions replace misperceptions</i></li><li>• <i>Appropriate workplace etiquette</i></li><li>• <i>Productivity</i></li><li>• <i>Coworker acceptance</i></li><li>• <i>Special contributions</i></li></ul>

# Coworker Perceptions over Time toward Youth with ID in the Workplace

Percentage of Coded Comments in Each Time Period  
(N=314)



# Analyzing Stigma

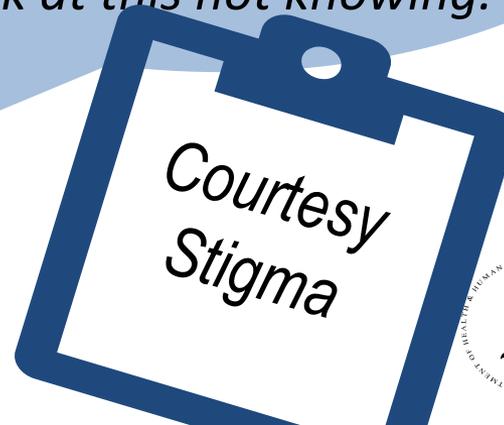
Prior



*"I was a little hesitant, a little concerned of kind of my own ability to be able to develop somebody in this situation...timid of my own ability."*



*"I was a little concerned about perceptions of our patients - how they would be perceived from a patient standpoint. I just did not know what the - how patients or visitors may look at this not knowing."*



# Analyzing Stigma

## Transitional

Youth are shy, fearful; likely aware of stigma

Possibility of self-stigma

Demonstrated proficiency leads to initial acceptance

'Actual' social identities

Seen as capable with individual gifts

Acceptance emerges among coworkers



*"I would give him a task that he needed to do, and initially I found myself kind of outlining it, every minute step by minute step, kind of ad nauseam. One time he looked at me, he said: 'Miss Thelma, I know how to staple!'"*

# Analyzing Stigma

## Current

Focus on  
abilities and  
competence

Appropriate  
workplace  
behaviors

Perceptions  
shift  
markedly

Tension  
dissipates

Stigma as a  
normative  
predicament

Stigma  
resolved but  
who has  
changed?

*"I would have never thought that someone with any type of disability would be one of my top performers in a job that requires critical thinking."*

*A normative  
predicament*

# Progression of One Coworker's Perceptions

## QUOTES FROM ROSE RED...

**PRIOR**: “At first, I didn't think that it was going to work because I did not have time to train anyone. I didn't have time to do any training. I just needed to get the work done. I thought that it would take me more time in dealing with them. I was doubtful that they could do it and that I would have the necessary skills to work with them.”

**DURING TRANSITION**: “She began to fit in more and I realized that she had a lot...if I asked her to do things beyond the simples, she was able to...I was concerned at first about communicating what I wanted her to do, if she was really picking that up. And I found that she was able to.”

**CURRENT**: “They really have more to offer than what I originally expected. Similar desires and abilities; really have greater abilities than we realize...we try to make them too different. It was a very good learning experience of what expectations I had for myself and for the other person. And my patience grew and so did their seeing and learning what they really can do.”

# Mediating Stigma

## Youth with ID



## Organizational Mentors



# Acceptance emerges through Inclusion

## Inclusion...

- Is a strategy employed by effective leaders;
- A way to engage and synchronize the efforts of diverse resources;
- Improves organizational effectiveness;
- One way that diversity is put into action;
- Creates a climate of involvement, respect, and human connection;
- Unleashes the richness of new approaches, backgrounds, and perspectives;
- Adds value to organizations.

# Special Workplace Contributions

**DIVERSITY THROUGH INDIVIDUALITY**  
**SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS**  
**INSPIRATION**  
**HOPE**

# Thank you!

