

OPEN FORUM SUMMARY

Overview:

In February 2025, Two Way Street hosted a live webinar on mentoring in AAC, led by our Director and Senior Speech Pathologist, Janelle Sampson.

Special guests included Dr. Emma Grace, Dr. Lateef McLeod, and Dr. Liora Ballin, who provided thought-provoking insights from their research and experience.

This event was attended by a diverse audience of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, AAC users, and parents.



Key Takeaways:

- Mentoring is more than guidance for a mentee - it is a way to reaffirm identity and create a sense of belonging.
- Mentors benefit too - we explored the often-overlooked impact of mentoring on mentors themselves
- Collaboration is key - families, schools and broader support networks all contribute and benefit in the mentoring process.
- Exploring the role of technology - online platforms present both opportunities and challenges in shaping effective mentoring relationships.
- Rethinking mentoring - how can we challenge traditional approaches to mentoring to break down barriers and offer better opportunities to AAC users?

Join the conversation

If you have anything to add, we want to hear from YOU.
Email us at mentoring@twowaystreet.com.au to get involved.

INSIGHTS

“ This thought-provoking discussion challenged me to rethink mentoring - not just as a means of guidance, but as a dynamic, evolving relationship that can foster identity, belonging, and shared growth for the mentor and mentee. It's exciting to consider the future directions of mentoring and AAC! ”



“ Research shows that mentoring can help balance out the negative effects of ableism for people who use AAC. (Dr Lateef McLeod) ”

“ Data shows that mentoring programs are able to cultivate in their participants a greater sense of self-advocacy and leadership skills. (Dr Lateef McLeod) ”



“ Mentoring programs serve as a community where people can reaffirm their identity among relatable peers. (Dr Lateef McLeod) ”

“ Mentoring is a Two Way Street and benefits both mentor and mentee. Mentors gain purpose, leadership, problem solving and learn a lot from the experience. Mentees develop their confidence in communication, gain new perspectives, create a sense of belonging” (Dr Emma Grace) ”



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This project is funded by the Australian Government DSS under the NDIS ILC program.

- Technical or equipment issues or breakdowns
- Scheduling or time issues
- Varied communication systems
- Varied communication styles and skill levels
- Feelings of anxiety or frustration
- Inflexible communication formats and a reliance on communication within the mentorship process
- Limited mentor training and awareness
- Lack of role models to discuss a self-advocacy focus
- The reliance on communication partners/support
- Communication takes longer for people with communication disability
- Motivation

Timeframes, payments and structure of mentoring are topics that elicit a lot of discussion with a variety of opinions and viewpoints. All of these ideas, the research and direct input from people with lived experience throughout this project, will provide input to how the Toolkit for the mentoring project will be developed. The toolkit will need to be flexible for many people to use in the way that they choose.

Timeframes of mentoring are an individual choice with some session attendees thinking they should be a fixed term, whilst others believe they should be more fluid. Whether or not mentoring should be a paid activity was also a hot topic with mixed opinions about whether the mentor should be paid for their time and experience.

The structure of mentoring is another contentious subject with mixed opinions about individual, group and formal as opposed to informal mentoring. It was noted that to date it would appear that the most effective mentoring sessions were structured one to one relationships with clear goals defined. We will set out to determine whether this is in fact true or whether one size does not fit all.

Where are the gaps?

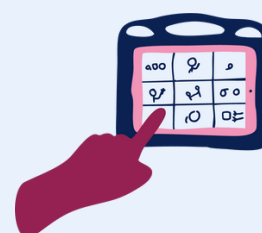
“ There is not much research into mentoring in the AAC community to date. (Dr Emma Grace) ”



“ Mentoring in the AAC community to date has not had much structure in most instances” (Dr Emma Grace) ”

What is best practice in mentoring?

“ Connecting a mentor with experience and skill with using a speech generating device with a mentee who was learning to use a speech generating device is important in order to be successful. (Dr Liora Ballin) ”



“ The research into formal mentoring tells us that structures are really important to ensure positive outcomes and that at times a lack of structure can lead to negative outcomes for both the mentor and mentee. (Dr Emma Grace) ”



“ Important research identifies some elements that are central to mentoring programs: role modelling, the mentor is imparting skill or knowledge through demonstration, the mentor has considerable skill and experience in the area of the mentoring focus, it's focused on achievement with distinct goals. (Marion Jackaby as discussed by Dr Liora Ballin). ”

“ The crucial first step in developing a mentoring program is to clearly define its goals, as this will illuminate the path forward and clarify subsequent steps. (Marion Jackaby as discussed by Dr Liora Ballin). ”



How do we make 'mentoring' more inclusive, effective and empowering for people with communication disability?

In the next phase we hope to find out more about what factors will enhance a mentor relationship to ensure they are set up for success. This is just the start of the conversation and leaves us with more questions than answers and we are excited to continue delving into the importance of mentoring and AAC!



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