

# WORDS OF CONNECTION IN MENTORING



## Acknowledgment of Terminology

At Two Way Street, we use the term People with Communication Disability (PWCD). This reflects the understanding that communication is not just about what someone says — it's about how they're understood, how others respond, the environment they're in, and what they're trying to express.

“Words” may not always look or sound the way we expect. For many in our community, words are gestures, signs, symbols, or selections on a screen. But the power of words to connect, build trust, and make people feel seen and understood remains the same.

We also know that not everyone prefers the terms PWCD or AAC. Some people choose different language to describe their communication journey. We respect that choice, because at the heart of respectful connection is listening to how people define themselves — and using language that reflects and values their identity.

These acknowledgments are more than polite footnotes. They are examples of how the words we choose — in all forms — shape relationships. And mentoring, at its core, is about building relationships through connection, communication, and shared growth.

## Phase 2: Redefining Mentoring Through Communication That Connects

In the December 2024 edition of In Focus, we introduced our project Redefining Mentoring in Unique Communication Scenarios, delivered in partnership with AGOSCI through an ILC grant from the Australian Government.

A year into the project, it's clearer than ever that mentoring is a relationship built through words — not just spoken words, but any form of communication that allows people to share, reflect, and grow together.

Traditional mentoring often relies heavily on conversation. But in unique communication scenarios, connection may be built slowly, through fewer words, more visuals, time to respond, or even shared silence. Phase 1 showed us that *mentoring that values and adapts to different ways of communicating* creates stronger, more authentic relationships — and greater opportunities for learning.



That's why we've introduced a new definition of mentoring:

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Mentoring is a flexible and inclusive relationship where both mentor and mentee learn and grow. It can happen in all kinds of ways, and both mentor and mentee may not even be aware that it's happening at times. Communication is adapted to fit the person, not the other way around.

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This is the heart of Mentoring2.0  
— a more flexible, person-centred  
and communication-inclusive  
model that values all kinds of  
words, stories, and expressions.

Two Way Street in collaboration with the AGOSCI community are proud to be shaking up traditional mentoring models and working to ensure that people with communication disability are not left out of opportunities to connect, grow, and lead.

As part of this, we've also engaged an advisory committee made up of people with lived experience, parents, educators, researchers, and therapists. This group plays a key role in shaping the direction of the project and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.



What We Learnt –  
Words That Connect,  
Words That Exclude

We reviewed research, hosted a national webinar, and recorded stories with people from the AAC community at the 2025 AGOSCI Conference. We listened to the “words” — verbal and nonverbal — that people used to describe mentoring experiences that lifted them up or left them out.

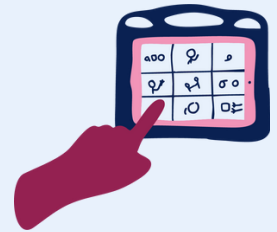
## What we found:

“ Connection and trust matter more than structure or formality. Mentoring works best when the relationship is real, respectful, and mutual. ”



“ Words don't have to be spoken to be powerful. Symbols, gestures, and AAC devices can express care, curiosity, encouragement, and wisdom — if others take the time to listen. ”

“ Mentoring breaks down when communication is one-way — when spoken words dominate, when pace is too fast, or when assumptions are made about what someone can or cannot express. ”



“ People want mentors who share lived experience — not just professional knowledge — and who use communication strategies that feel familiar or respectful. ”



“ Many people said they didn't even realise they were mentoring or being mentored — which reminds us that mentoring often grows in quiet, everyday interactions. It doesn't always start with a job title or formal match; it starts with connection. ”

Ultimately, we learned that mentoring is a relationship that is *built* word by word — and in any *form that those words take*.



## How to Contribute – Your Words, Your Stories, Your Toolkit

Phase 2 is about going deeper. Now, we're co-designing the national mentoring toolkit with the community, not for it. We're gathering words of experience and insight:

- What has helped you connect in a mentoring relationship?
- What communication tools or strategies made the difference?
- What do you wish people understood about mentoring when communication happens differently?

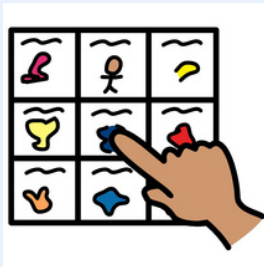
## Phase Two

Early in Phase 2, we invited people to share personal stories and mentoring examples from their communities. These stories will be used to create resources that could be trialed, adapted, and potentially added to the final national toolkit. This approach gave life to real mentoring experiences and let the “words of connection” be shaped by those living them.

We’re excited to announce that there will be more opportunities in 2026. These will support the creation of mentoring tools and ideas that value diverse ways of communicating. The toolkit is still being shaped — and we need your help to create it.



## Tell Us What You Think



Whether your “words” are typed, spoken, drawn, or symbolised — we want to hear them.

- Do you have a story of connection through mentoring?
- Have you been a mentor without even knowing it?
- What makes you feel heard and understood in relationships?

Your reflections, no matter the format, are part of shaping a toolkit that includes and reflects real lives and real language.

## Stay Connected

Listen to the Podcast Series - Sharing Words That Matter

Hear voices from the AAC community in our podcast series, recorded live at the 2025 AGOSCI Conference. The stories shared there shaped how we’re thinking about mentoring — and they might inspire your own reflections.



Got something to say? Reach out:

Email: [mentoring@twowaystreet.com.au](mailto:mentoring@twowaystreet.com.au) | Web: [twowaystreet.com.au/mentoring](http://twowaystreet.com.au/mentoring)  
Or join the conversation on Facebook or LinkedIn @TwoWaySt

Mentoring begins not with a plan, but with a connection. And connection begins with words — however they’re formed, shared, or received. Whether you’re a fluent speaker, an AAC user, a quiet observer, or a passionate advocate, your words matter. Let’s keep building this toolkit together — one relationship, one insight, and one unique way of communicating at a time.