

Redefining mentoring in unique communication scenarios

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Short Abstract

Mentorship involves guidance and support from a mentor that fosters personal and professional growth in a mentee. Peer mentoring, particularly among individuals with shared experiences, promotes self-determination and social capital. This evidence-based approach is emerging as an alternative or adjunct intervention model, however traditional mentoring often poses accessibility challenges for people with communication disabilities (PWCD), as it typically relies on spoken communication, which may not accommodate diverse needs.

In June 2024, Two Way Street and AGOSCI received a three-year Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant to explore and redefine mentoring practices for PWCD. This project aims to create a nationally accessible toolkit that supports peer mentoring for both emergent and skilled communicators, from young children to adults, in various accessible formats.

The project unfolds in three phases:

1. Information Gathering: Reviewing existing research and community consultations to identify gaps and best practices.
2. Deep Dive and Co-Design: Conducting detailed interviews and focus groups with PWCD to collaboratively design the toolkit.
3. Toolkit Development: Creating a toolkit with resources in accessible formats, incorporating feedback from all stakeholders to ensure it meets the needs of PWCD.

This presentation will share preliminary findings from the information-gathering phase, inviting feedback and suggestions from the AGOSCI community. Participants will learn about the research evidence, along with the key components, benefits and challenges of existing programs.

Long Abstract

Mentorship is the patronage, influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor.[1] Patronage more specifically includes encouragement, support, and enablement. A mentee is someone who seeks to grow - either personally or professionally. Peer mentoring is recognised for its potential to foster self-determination, social capital, and meaningful outcomes among individuals with shared experiences.

As an evidence-based approach, peer mentoring is gaining traction as an alternative to traditional therapy models. It is designed to facilitate mutual support and knowledge sharing among individuals with similar experiences. Traditional mentoring predominantly hinges on spoken communication and is typically conducted in one-on-one or small group settings. Despite its potential, previous programs have often struggled with accessibility issues for people with communication disabilities (PWCD). These issues include assumptions about communication that do not account for the diverse needs of PWCD. Traditional mentoring creates a conundrum for PWCD as it requires the same skill set as the purpose. Considering this complexity, it makes sense to ponder whether the purpose and benefits of mentoring can be achieved through alternative pathways and opportunities.

In June 2024, Two Way Street and AGOSCI were awarded a 3 year Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant funding to explore and redefine effective mentoring practices for and by PWCD. The goal of this 3 year project is to explore current mentoring practices, the evidence base and lived experience to inform and address the unique requirements for mentors and mentees in such a way that we can redefine mentoring in this context. The project will deliver a nationally available toolkit to enable peer mentoring that is inclusive of emergent as well as skilled communicators, young children to adults, and available in formats that are accessible in varied locations and formats. Through the process of connecting PWCD and enabling patronage, influence, guidance, or direction through these connections, we hope to achieve a greater sense of self-representation and self-advocacy that steps beyond conventional therapy and ableist frameworks.

A central tenet of this project is the active involvement of individuals with lived experience of communication disabilities to ensure that the toolkit is both relevant and practical.

The project outcomes will evolve across 3 phases:

1. Phase 1: Information Gathering

- This phase includes a thorough review of existing research on peer mentoring, experiences from past and current programs, and community consultation that will help to identify current gaps and suggested practices. Findings will be shared across our community of PWCD, their families, educators and service providers. Phase 1 will culminate in a summary of knowledge and ideas along with comments, feedback and creative suggestions.

2. Phase 2: Deep dive and Co-Design

- This phase takes a deeper dive into personal experiences of mentoring based on the perspectives learned in phase 1. It will include detailed interviews with PWCD and other contributors to explore personal experiences with peer mentoring. These will be combined with focus groups, and a range of other mechanisms to ensure community collaboration in the co-design of the toolkit. Resources created during phases 1 and 2 will also be shared as they are developed for wide ranging use and feedback.

3. Phase 3: Toolkit Development

- In this phase, the draft toolkit will be created and collated building on insights from Phases 1 and 2. It will include videos, resources, programs and guidelines in various accessible formats that may be accessed individually, in groups, with a peer mentor or within existing service options such as day programs, schools, allied health services or community based programs. Draft resources and documentation will be shared with the community for feedback and the iterative process across the 3 years will ensure that the toolkit meets the needs of PWCD and incorporates their input. The final toolkit will be made available nationally, with a focus on maximising accessibility and impact through effective marketing and community engagement.

This presentation will share findings from the information gathering phase of the project. Although Phase 1 will not be completed prior to the conference, we will summarise and share information collected to date in a view to generate feedback, comments and creative suggestions from the AGOSCI community. Participants will learn about the research evidence along with the key components, benefits and challenges of existing programs. Participants will also be encouraged to participate in the communication consultations process directly following the presentation and as a continuing process throughout the period of the project.

References:

- ["Definition of MENTORSHIP"](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentorship). www.merriam-webster.com. [Archived](#) from the original on 2020-11-12. Retrieved 2021-03-13.