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Being diagnosed with level 3 autism at an early age, Gabe engages with the world as a non-speaking communicator, who uses different tools to express his thoughts and feelings.

Through the NDIS, Gabe has been equipped with his communicator, an assistive technology communication device that empowers him to connect to the world around him in ways he never thought possible.

‘Communication isn’t just talking, it’s any way he can express himself,’ Gabe’s mum, Alison said.

‘Communication has always taken priority for us because we can’t have those quality relationships without communication.

‘He can tell us what toys or food he wants or to go outside, and when he wants his shoes off, all these things. He can tell us now.

‘Thanks to the NDIS for providing not just the communicator, but also the support for the communicator and speech therapy that goes along with learning those things.’

Having trialled different options for Gabe in the past, he has shown the most progress in the past 12 months.

‘I’ve read literature on early intervention and Gabe’s progress has improved significantly in the past year or 2,’ Alison said.

‘In the early years where he had tons of early intervention, he was absorbing it there, it’s just now he’s able to express it.’

Gabe’s speech therapist continually enhances and expands his communicator, ensuring it meets Gabe’s every need.

‘I remember one time he was crying and led me to the food cupboard, and I was like ‘all right mate, I’ll feed you’,’ Alison said.

‘Then he walked over to his communicator, which sits on the kitchen bench, which he goes to when he wants to communicate, and he hit the button that said ‘flat battery’.

‘He was leading me to the food cupboard because the batteries are kept up the top of it. Without the communicator, I would never have understood what he wanted.

‘There is a menu subset in his communicator that is tailored for him.

Sometimes he just wants his popcorn to be put in a bowl, so we have a button that says, ‘put it in a bowl’.

Gabe is also a keen Cub Scout, attending his local scouts’ group regularly.

‘One of the most special things he’s done with his communicator was his investment in Cubs,’ Alison said.

‘Where he must recite his pledge, we customised his device to be able to do his pledge so he could be involved with the process.

‘This is what we want, seeing our kids being involved in the community, with things like Cubs.

‘It’s so important, even for the other kids in scouts who don’t have a disability.’

Alison expressed immense gratitude for the assistance provided by their local area coordinator, Nadia.

‘Nadia at Carers Queensland has been absolutely amazing. She's not just empathetic but so helpful with things we hadn’t even thought about which would be useful for our family,’ Alison said.

Over the next 12 months, the family would like to further develop Gabe’s communication skills, aiming to express not only his needs but also his wants using his communicator.

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