



Contact 
inc.

Year in review 2020-2021

Contact would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which we live and work within, paying respect to First Nation Elders past and present and of the future.

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Our Foundations

Contact Inc. (Contact) was established in 1979 as a follow on program for the International Year of the Child to help to address the impacts of isolation for children, families and communities.

Our Objectives

- a) To relieve, within the limits of the resources available to the project, poverty, disadvantage and isolation suffered by young children on the basis of need, irrespective of race, creed or religion;
- b) To provide assistance, information, referrals and support to people caring for young children in isolated circumstances;
- c) To stimulate interest in the wellbeing of young isolated children by improving community awareness of the needs of children.

Our Purpose and Vision

Isolation is defined as those who lack reasonable and reliable access to other people, services and resources and have no regular links with other families and children.

Our purpose is to address the impacts of isolation on children, families, and communities, working across all children, family, and children's sectors, to relieve disadvantage and isolation.

Irrespective of locality and circumstances, our vision remains that isolated children, families, and communities have access to education, health, supports, information and services to best meet their needs.



Photo by Elsa Cuyader on Unsplash

Our Board

Executive

President	Megan Mitchell AM
Vice President	Vacant
Treasurer	Nathan Kitto
Secretary	Fiona Prentice

General Board

Kathryn Greiner AO
Nerida Healy

Public Officer

Maureen Fegan OAM

Chief Executive Officer

Sue Kingwill

Auditor

Audit and Risk Solutions
Pty Ltd

We acknowledge all who have advised and assisted Contact throughout its history and for the commitment shown for the welfare of Australia's isolated children, families and communities.

The Year of supporting each other through difficult times

We proudly present our 2021 Year in Review, sharing our experiences and achievements in helping to address the impacts of isolation for children, families and their communities.

Contact's focus and core business has always been working inclusively and respectfully with parents, carers, the community and relevant agencies to relieve disadvantage and isolation and reaching children in the most remote areas.

Working as a catalyst for change at the local level to sustain families and build positive wellbeing outcomes is a priority, complemented by being a vocal advocate for equity, equitable access, community capacity building and quality service delivery.

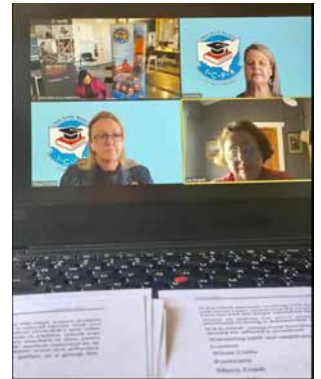
Life is complicated enough and to say the least, this year has been one that we will all never forget. Our time has been spent thoughtfully considering what this means to the regions we are working within. Throughout we have been reminded of the importance of remaining in touch, creating new connections and nurturing existing relationships. All this needs to be coupled with a mindfulness of human vulnerabilities, supporting and seeking to find ways to ease the struggles that communities and individuals are facing through these difficult times by continuing provision of practical and trusted advice.

PHOTO:
Online links have provided a means to stay in touch with people or to conduct a variety of meetings and in this instance, with a NSW ICPSA State Council delegation.

The year has also provided the opportunity to assess the most appropriate mechanisms to reinforce our commitment to isolated and remote areas, understanding that isolation affects people in so many ways.

Field trips strengthen our knowledge and connections and although many such endeavours were postponed, some visits were able to be made to several locations including Brewarrina, Canberra, Coonamble, Cunnamulla, Dubbo, Griffith, Hay, Lightning Ridge, Louth, Tilpa and Wanaaring.

In many respects, Contact was ahead of the game when COVID impacted, following a move to a remote home office model in 2018, with additional staffing contracted as and when required.



Guided by Public Health requirements, Contact has evaluated its capabilities to respond despite the many obstacles that were presented. A full seamless service delivery transition during lockdowns was facilitated by utilising established operational systems and technological supports. Assessment and planning were also undertaken by using tools such as regional survey monkeys, social feeds and electronic media when it was not possible to visit rural and remote communities.

Ongoing information shared by families, community members and agencies suggest that during



this time of limited community interaction, remote Australians have become even more isolated.

Heightened child and adult anxiety were evidenced throughout the areas that we work within. Many children, families and community members have been significantly impacted by drought, followed by COVID 19, with lasting financial and wellbeing effects and few opportunities to come together and to have a sense of optimism for their future. Chronic stress and uncertainty from the drought combined with relative isolation and accessibility issues has led to increased risk of developing a mental illness, depression or anxiety.

Resoundingly, remote and isolated families have spoken of their need for ongoing support and social interactions with others - for people to be with people. Many have expressed interest in accessing early childhood

programs, child and family support networks and options for the adults to be with other adults.

Contact has continued to extensively utilise our networks to identify ways to develop and implement innovative responses by partnering with families, communities, regional services and organisations.

New and existing partnerships have extended our ability to further support and reach isolated children and families, working collaboratively towards shared agendas.

We profile a few highlights from the year such as:

- With optimism for the future in January 2021, Contact and Paroo Contact Children's Mobile announced a joining of forces to create one agency, working together to improve the lives of children and families who live in

PHOTO:
Since 1987 Paroo
Contact Children's
Mobile served areas
of north western
NSW and south
western QLD.

isolated areas and disadvantaged communities of northwest NSW and southwest Queensland.

- In Wanaaring, in association with local and regional groups, Contact is evolving the Wanaaring Community Hub to better utilise the Paroo Contact Children's Mobile facility as a base for professional accommodation, community and agency use.
- Three highly successful RuralCONNECT Child and Family Fun Days were held at Louth, Tilpa and Wanaaring, facilitated in partnership with the Royal Flying Doctor Service SE Section, Louth and Wanaaring Public Schools, Tilpa Progress Association and a range of regional agencies. Over 150 child, family, community members and agencies attended, bringing communities together to socialise, access early childhood experiences, meet regional agencies and simply enjoy the freedom of being with each other.
- The Murra in Murra (Hand in Hand) partnership with Brewarrina's Gainmara Birrilee Aboriginal Preschool has resulted in ongoing family one on one consultations by the Preschool Director, the establishment of a seasonal based pop-up clothing shop and legal aid supports for the Preschool and its families. Options for a fruit and vegetable garden patch are now being examined.
- A Coonamble Aboriginal Child and Family survey resulted in the 'Voices from the Community' report articulating the realities of

90 Aboriginal families with young children, including options to address their identified needs and requirements.

- A special acknowledgement of Contact's unique role was received through a Community Achievement Awards nomination for Regional NSW and the ACT Awards Australia submitted by a northwest NSW supporter championing our work within the community.
- With the intent of building early literacy outcomes - Paint the Town REaD and Contact announced an agreement to explore options to evolve early literacy opportunities in western NSW and southwest Queensland to be known as Paint the Outback REaD.
- Engagement with the Minderoo Foundation Thrive by Thrive initiative is providing avenues to advance rural and remote early childhood agendas and with the University of NSW Social Impact Student Practicum stream, access to new ideas to enhance the organisation's operations.

Many individuals, organisations, donors and funding bodies have assisted Contact and with great appreciation, we acknowledge the funding secured from individual donors and the CAGES Foundation, Royal Flying Doctor Service SE Section through the NSW Ministry of Health and Ardill House, the Society for Providing Services for Neglected or Needy Children.

With gratitude, we also thank the many individuals and groups



who have championed our work and contributed to enhance the organisation's ability to fulfil its commitments. These include: Tannas Godfrey and Amy Palmer, guiding the Paroo Contact Children's Mobile transitions; Graham Wheeler, Solicitor, for ongoing pro bono legal guidance; Martin Daniell and Tony Willsallen for their generous assistance with remote area air travel arrangements; GIVIT Foundation and the Orange Rotary Club enabling donated goods to be made readily available to Brewarrina's Gainmara Birrilee Preschool; the Royal Flying Doctor Service SE Section for access to meeting rooms; Western NSW Local Health District Risk Management Unit for its continuing guidance on refining Contact's Risk Management strategy; NSW and Federal ICPA and many other community and government representatives who have unreservedly provided

supportive guidance and information.

The professionalism and commitment of Contact's staff is the organisation's greatest asset. The loyal efforts of Cherie Butryn, Administrator; Robin Saunders, Project Officer; Wanaaring area based – Helen Ponder and Robert McDonald; the Coonamble Aboriginal Community Engagement team of Lucy Robinson, Jenna Fernando, Tahlia Arrowsmith and Tahleeta Fernando; and Consultants, Purpose Accounting, Brendan O'Donnell, Lucy Main and Lee O'Connor are all acknowledged for their valued contributions.

The organisation is overseen by a multi-disciplinary Board of highly experienced professionals with governance expertise and their collective contributions are recognised. All Board members are continuing with the organisation for the coming year and will

ensure the ongoing achievement of strong governance practices and the meeting of all statutory responsibilities and obligations.

Structurally, the Board has met six times during this year, complemented by the Board's two Committees that focus on either Strategy, Sustainability, Communications or Finance Audit and Risk Management. Contact's Governance Charter, Delegations and Policies have been reviewed, strategic planning objectives are reflected in organisational reporting structures and risk identification, management and mitigation are an ongoing priority for the organisation.

Going forward, although being in sound financial health, the realities of finding ongoing and further funding is a key requirement in the coming years to ensure and support Contact's sustainability into the future.

From inception in 1979, Contact has demonstrated its capacity to effectively work within changing community priorities, budgetary constraints and in a range of contexts,

to support the identification of local community requirements and the development of responsive solutions based on articulated need.

A key focus of Contact's mission is to help the families and children of isolated and marginalised communities find their voice, express their needs and advocate for local solutions.

During these difficult times, this has been even more challenging than ever, but more needed than ever, as the impacts of drought and the pandemic have hit our communities hardest. Despite this, we are very grateful that the people in remote areas we serve have continued to come forward to tell their stories, engage in dialogue and support each other and we commend and thank them for this from the bottom of our hearts.

We look forward to the year ahead when we can come together again and more often, to provide further services and supports to promote the wellbeing of isolated children and their families.



Megan Mitchell AM
Contact President

25 November 2021



Sue Kingwill
Chief Executive Officer



Our commitment to remote and isolated areas



RuralCONNECT

The Royal Flying Doctor Service, South Eastern Section (RFDS SE) covers NSW and ACT and border towns in South Australia and Queensland. In remote northwestern NSW, Contact in partnership with RFDS SE, have continued to offer RuralCONNECT, a collaborative program created to better support families with young children living in these areas.

Bec Bennett who was awarded a 12-month RuralCONNECT Scholarship in 2020, continues to progress successfully with her Bachelor of Midwifery course requirements



through Charles Darwin University and we wish Bec every success with her future career pursuits.

Three highly successful RuralCONNECT Child and Family Fun Days were held during the year at Louth, Tilpa and Wanaaring and these relaxed fulfilled days designed to:

- Connect isolated children and their families with others in the region as well as promote a range of support services.

Coil basket making facilitated by West Darling Arts at the Tilpa Child and Family Day.





PHOTO:
RuralCONNECT
Child and Family
Fun Day at the
Wanaaring
Community Hub

- Facilitate opportunities to build families knowledge of services and programs available to them in the region.
- Support as appropriate, children and families recovering from the adverse impact of the drought and COVID19.

Early and middle childhood activities were provided in tandem with a chance to develop drumming, ukulele or coil basket making skills, with delicious catering locally prepared at each location. Adding value to the days were the offering of free haircuts by a qualified hairdresser, furniture restoration demonstrations, a skin and inner health presentation complemented by skin consultations, a roving photographer and in Tilpa, a tourist dropped by to show interested participants how to paint using charcoal-based mediums.

Many individuals and organisations contributed towards these positive results and acknowledgement is made of the support of Louth and Wanaaring Public Schools, Louth Branch of ICPA, Louth P&C, Bourke and District Children's Service (Mobile) and the Outback Mobile Children's Service, Bourke Connected Beginnings, NSW State Government, Department of Primary Industries Drought Resilience Program, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency, Lila Leigo Centre Trustees, ICPA NSW State Council, Louth Preschool, RFDS SE Child and Family Nurse, Drug and Alcohol Clinician, We've Got Your Back and the Child and Family Mental Health teams, Tilpa Progress Association, Wanaaring Store and Caravan Park and West Darling Arts.

All of this was possible through funding from the NSW State Government Ministry of Health and the Department of Primary Industries Drought Resilience Program and the efforts of the RuralCONNECT Project Officer, Helen Ponder and all are respectfully recognised with thanks.

Three further Child and Family Days were in the planning for 2021 however with regret these were all put on hold because of emerging regional COVID lockdowns.

To understand RuralCONNECT families' ongoing priorities, a survey monkey process was instigated with eighteen (18) families responding and this information is now being utilised to plan 2022 activities.

We look forward with optimism to progressing RuralCONNECT in the year ahead, utilising existing funding allocated towards the three proposed 2021 events and enhanced through the recent awarding of a Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal Tackling Tough Times Together Grant towards RuralCONNECT actions.

On behalf of Contact and RFDS SE, our appreciation is expressed to all that have engaged and contributed to RuralCONNECT, working together to seek to make a difference in northwest NSW for children, families and the community.



Community-led Solutions

The CAGES Foundation supports organisations committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

A deeply valued CAGES Foundation commitment is enabling Contact the ability to continue work within the Brewarrina and Coonamble communities of northwest NSW, whilst complementing existing child and family services to achieve desired goals and outcomes for children and families in these two locations.

Every week, Uncle Brad visits Gainmara Birrilee Preschool to offer a language group with the 4-year-olds who are readily picking up the local Negemba language.

PHOTO:
Courtesy Gainmara
Birrilee Preschool



Murra in Murra

Gainmara Birrilee
Preschool



In Brewarrina, our partnership with Gainmara Birrilee Preschool, called Murra in Murra (Hand in Hand) is building upon and valuing connections between a child's home life, their families and the Preschool.

The Gainmara Birrilee Director has sustained one on one consultations with Preschool families at the family home or their place of choice, seeking to define ways to further respond to their individual requirements. Findings have formed the evolution of a raft of solutions.

As an example, in response to expressed needs surrounding access to affordable clothing, a seasonal pop-up clothing shop will be offered as an ongoing feature at the Preschool. To commence, donated Bonds under-

wear and socks were secured through the GIVIT Foundation, an online non-profit organisation that manages donations to make sure people and communities get exactly what they need, when they need it. Rotary Club of Orange then generously transported these goods to Brewarrina. A further gifting by Ardill House will assist with future transportation costs and an emerging relationship with Threads Together, will be enacted to further extend this potential by delivering new good quality clothing and shoes to those in need.

Civil Law Services (Legal Aid) have come on board to offer targeted legal assistance for families and staff linked to the Preschool. In action, this may include training for the Director and staff to use a Legal Tool Kit to identify key issues with families at enrolment or as they emerge for follow up with Civil Law Services, or the provision of promotional materials for use within the Preschool newsletter or dedicated appointments for Preschool families as required, to resolve issues either during future Brewarrina visits or by telephone.

A fruit and vegetable garden patch for use by the Preschool and families is now under consideration which may lead to a range of opportunities such as further engaging with Elders surrounding their knowledge of bush tucker and medicine or developing nutrition programs.

We record our gratefulness to Frayne Barker OAM and the Brewarrina Gainmara Birrilee Preschool team and all that have contributed to these progressive actions to further assist children and families involved with the Preschool.

Voices from the Community

Whilst in Coonamble, a local Coordinator and four Coonamble Aboriginal Community Engagement Project Officers were engaged with the intent of capturing Coonamble Aboriginal families' perspectives relating to their child and family requirements. This was part of Contact's broader strategy of strengthening capacity to further reach isolated people, then develop and implement in this instance, Coonamble place-based locally defined solutions in ways that best fit their family need and requirements.

In a team approach, the Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers worked in pairs and went out into their community house by house, to introduce the project, invite participation, ask the agreed survey questions and to listen and learn. The same survey questions were asked at each interview with family responses manually recorded, returned to the Project Coordinator and then entered into Survey Monkey for analysis purposes.

A total of 90 Aboriginal families engaged in the Coonamble Aboriginal Child and Family Survey out of a potential 110 families identified at project inception. These Coonamble families collectively provided invaluable information about their experiences and realities and we deeply acknowledge their contributions.



As a result of the survey, family profiling revealed a significant number of Coonamble Aboriginal families with young children aged up to 12 years of age. At the time of the survey, there were three pregnant women identified in addition to 84 children aged birth to five years of age, 59 children aged six to 12 years of age and 16 children aged 12 to 18 years. Eight families also revealed they were caring for other peoples' children and 14 children were identified as having special needs.

Questions were raised in the survey process relating to families' level of engagement with existing funded Coonamble children's services inclusive of after school and vacation care and weekend sports as well as screenings linked to pregnancy, children's early intervention and their attendance at a Mothers or Parent Support Groups. Families input about their awareness or attendance at

various Coonamble based programs and whether their needs were being met as well as where and how they access information was also raised.

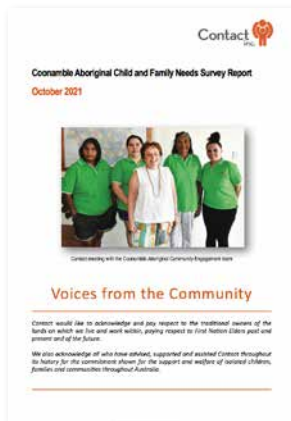
Only eight families felt their requirements were met locally and commentary was provided by 56 families that they travelled through a variety of transport arrangements to Dubbo, Coonabarabran or used online options if services, supports or goods were not readily available within the Coonamble community.

An exploration of communication tools revealed that many had access to a range of devices and a number were readily using technology as a communication tool. A significant group also revealed they had difficulties filling out paperbased or online forms.

Three open ended options provided an opportunity for respondents to communicate further with most

PHOTO:
Lee O'Connor,
Sue Kingwill and
Lucy Robinson
at the McDonald
Park, Coonamble
gathering.

participants openly shared insights into their concerns providing indicators of a variety of approaches



and programs that would be of value including information about services and supports they required.

A draft report titled **'Voices from the Community'**

was subsequently written in association with the four Coonamble Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers and local Project Coordinator after the compilation of the survey results.

With a commitment to community as the next step, survey participants were invited to a McDonald Park gathering to hear about the outcomes and draft proposed actions. Over 20 families attended endorsing the report and their further input was greatly valued. Attendees supported the follow-on presentation of the 'Voices from the Community' Report to the Coonamble Interagency group, various levels of government and key interested parties.

Several additional parties assisted at the McDonald Park gathering and our appreciation is recorded for the assistance provided by Adam Cohen and Damian Lee from Clontarf Indigenous Boys Academy, Steven Smith, Rodney Vallett, Coonamble Cellars and Khan's IGA Supermarket.



The contributions of the four Coonamble Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers – Tahlia Arrowsmith, Jenna Fernando, Tahleeta Fernando and Lucy Robinson and the Project Coordinator, Lee O'Connor, are recognised as these results were made possible directly through their trusted connections and knowledge.

This project has provided an avenue to learn about what would make a difference for Coonamble Aboriginal families and children and funding avenues are now being explored to enact upon the survey findings and to collaborate with other stakeholders to maximise the impact and potential of this survey.

PHOTO:
Coonamble
Aboriginal
Community
Engagement
Officers – Jenna
Fernando, Tahleeta
Fernando, Sue
Kingwill (Contact
CEO), Lucy
Robinson and
Tahlia Arrowsmith



Building sustainable remote regions and developing positive outcomes for local children, families and communities

Paroo Contact Children's Mobile

Contact and the Paroo Contact Children's Mobile (PCCM)

unitedly announced

in January 2021 that Contact and PCCM were joining forces to create one agency, working together to improve the lives of children and families who live in isolated areas and disadvantaged communities of northwest NSW and southwest Queensland.



Both organisations share a similar history and vision, dedicated to achieving more for remote and isolated children and their families through early childhood development programs and family supports.

To better realise this goal and build a stronger and more effective

organisation, Contact and PCCM merged and will continue, where relevant, to seek child and family related projects, funding and grants for the PCCM service delivery region that had a reach across a vast geographic region of 36,000 sq. kms in northwest NSW and southwest Queensland.

Wanaaring Community Hub

For over nearly four decades, Contact has had a long term and trusted relationship within the Wanaaring region.

This area is classified as Very Remote (ARIA score >5.80–9.08) which by definition translates to a location or area that has very restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction. On the ground, the ARIA remoteness classification is evidenced by very tangible features in that many services are less accessible.

Within the Wanaaring village, there are limited facilities other than the small Public School, Shop and Caravan Park, RFDS SE Clinic, Local Health Clinic and community hall. In addition, Contact and PCCM owns a well maintained, one-bedroom self-contained accommodation facility with attractive child friendly grounds in this community.

Initial scoping consultations surrounding opportunities to better utilise this facility have been undertaken and we know that suitable accommodation options for visiting professionals is a barrier.

It is also known there are no suitable facilities for:

- Private small meeting spaces for visiting professionals to engage with individuals (external to private homes) within a range of sensitive discussions;
- Employment, skilling providers and other government funded providers to offer their programs and for individuals to connect (in person or via technology) with accredited Vocational Education and Training provider(s);
- Dedicated child friendly and safe and attractive areas for families, children and community members to come together to access visiting child, family and wellbeing service; and
- Visiting personal interest service providers (e.g. hairdressers, yoga or massage) to offer their services.

In response, Contact is working with the locals and relevant agencies to develop the underutilised Wanaaring facility into a community hub to further build social impact solutions to emerging requirements such as:

- Suitable accommodation provided to enable visiting professionals an option to stay for designated periods;
- Government and community agencies able to access appropriate space to support their work within the regions;
- Individuals to be able to connect (in person or via technology) with accredited Vocational Education and Training providers;
- Regional skilling options to be



developed with providers able to offer their programs in the area on a scheduled basis;

- Realistic avenue for visiting professionals to have a base for a variety of purposes including early childhood screenings, allied health programs and special interest activities;
- Dedicated child and family programs able to be offered utilising child friendly and safe grounds;
- Community wellbeing enhanced through the availability of programs that may not have been otherwise feasible; and
- Opportunity to utilise the space for a range of community requirements and providing a sense of place and purpose.

As investment into sustaining families, regional wellbeing and

building a sense of optimism in remote areas, Contact is pursuing a range of funding sources to make this a reality. It is anticipated this venture will also provide valuable insights to inform other remote or very remote areas.

Paint the Town ReAD

With the intent of developing early literacy opportunities from birth so that children are ready to learn at school in various remote areas, during the year Contact and Paint the Town REaD joined forces to evolve Paint the Outback REaD, targeting areas within far western NSW and southwestern Queensland.

Contact is now scoping avenues to advance and implement early literacy actions in these regions.



PHOTO:
A RuralCONNECT
event demonstrating
how the Wanaaring
Community Hub can
be further utilised.

Our current Partners



Gainmara Birrilee
Preschool



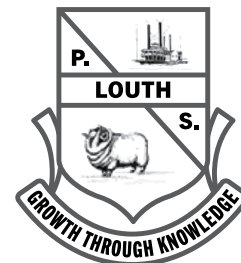
Royal Flying Doctor Service
SOUTH EASTERN SECTION



GIVIT



THRIVE BY FIVE







FOR THE DENNIS CLUB
MEMBERSHIP LIST

FOR THE DENNIS CLUB
MEMBERSHIP LIST

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