

A close-up photograph of a man wearing a brown hat and a green jacket, smiling as he holds a baby. The baby is wrapped in a blue knitted blanket and wearing a red and white striped beanie. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

contact
For families with disabled children

Supporting families in a time of crisis

Annual Review 2020/21



A message from our Chief Executive

It has been such an extraordinary and challenging year that has had a profound impact on all our lives. But for no group has this been truer than for families with disabled children, as support networks fractured and help suddenly cut off, some of which is still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

At Contact we made the decision to lean-in to the crisis, despite the financial uncertainty. It was strongly felt that we couldn't look back and wish we had done more. As a measure of this, none of our frontline staff were furloughed.

We are proud that Contact not only maintained, but increased support throughout the year. We are incredibly grateful to the funders who enabled us to step up to meet the challenge. The generosity of individuals, and the way government, the national lottery, and trusts and foundations extended their support, enabled us to get out an emergency response. And we are humbled by the huge effort of Contact's workforce, donors, volunteers and board of trustees, who have worked incredibly hard during this difficult year to ensure families were not alone and were offered the support they desperately needed.

We know that families with disabled children continue to be disproportionately affected by the fallout of the crisis and their support networks are still fractured. We are now committed to finding new funding to enable us to continue to provide our much needed support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Batten".

Amanda Batten, CEO

Our year in numbers



We helped
196,000
parents with advice,
information and support
10%
more than last year.



Families using our Family
Finances helpline service
were on average better off by
£5,538
a year.



500,000
family carers benefited
from our Covid vaccine
campaign to get early
access to the jab.



Families seeking advice and
support from our website and
other digital means increased by
44%
nearly
50,000
more families.



4,170
parent carers and
739
professionals attended our online
workshops, webinars and drop ins.



We enabled
11,500
supporters to take
social action in our
campaigns on the
Covid vaccine for
parent carers and
disabled children and
getting more financial
support for families
during the pandemic.



We delivered
521
Listening Ear appointments, our brand
new service launched to help with the
anxiety and emotional strain felt by
many parents during the pandemic.



4,800+
members on our new private
Facebook group for parents, an
amazing digital community of
people who go above and beyond
to help one another.



97%
of families would
recommend Contact's
services to others.



Our pandemic response

It was immediately apparent that the impact of the pandemic on the families we support would be enormous, as their support through schools and children's services disappeared overnight. Our services and support became more vital than ever to reduce the isolation families were experiencing and throughout the year we expanded in all three areas of our work.

Advice and Information

Contact's Information and Advice team saw no break in service despite moving from an office-based staff team to entirely home-based overnight. The length and emotional intensity of calls to our free national helpline went up as parents struggled to cope left without support.

A shifting landscape

The changing coronavirus rules and policies affecting disabled children and their families meant creating bespoke advice and information as each was announced to ensure families were kept up-to-date and reassured. Families seeking advice and support from our website and other digital platforms increased by 28%.

Emotional support

When families went into lockdown the emotional intensity and length of calls to our helpline skyrocketed, reflecting the huge anxiety families were experiencing left isolated at home to manage their children's complex medical and behavioural needs without support. Parents we spoke to were left terrified their child's condition made them more vulnerable to the virus.

Our new 'Listening Ear' service

In response we launched our Listening Ear service, where mums or dads can speak to Contact's parent advisers. These hour-long sessions can be used to vent frustrations, share fears and gain reassurance. Not only are they a huge source of emotional support, our parent advisers provide practical advice such as booking a call-back with our Family Finance team, enrolling a parent onto one of our workshops, or linking them up with a support group. Whatever they need, we're here for them. As demand soars, we urgently look to our funders and partners for ongoing support of this vital service.

"It has honestly made such a difference to have someone listen and be able to talk about everything without being judged or worrying that I am going on about it too much! I have not been able to find that kind of support anywhere else. Thank you for the support and for reminding me what I know!"

Emma Williams, mum to Oliver aged 10

97%

said they were satisfied or very satisfied with our What's New e-newsletter, which moved from fortnightly to weekly, as demand for news and information grew.

733,698

visitors to the advice and support section of our website. Of those, 367,896 visited our dedicated coronavirus advice pages which are regularly updated.

Throughout the year our helpline responded to

9,737

enquiries on all issues affecting families with disabled children, including health, schools, rights and entitlements.

Emergency support to families in need

Throughout the year we were able to offer emergency support packages to families most in need, from boxes of toys and equipment to tablets and supermarket vouchers.

Our London offices support local families with dedicated family workers offering face-to-face advice. They have very close relationships with parent carers in their communities. As the pandemic hit we moved online and immediately saw a desperate need for financial support – from putting food on the table to accessing computers for home-schooling.

Thankfully we secured emergency funding to supply a mix of supermarket vouchers and tablet computers to 383 of the most vulnerable families in our London communities.

Helping 1,305 parents with essential clothes and equipment

Our not-for-profit Fledglings shop supplies life-changing products, clothing and equipment for disabled children to help with everyday challenges. We knew products from our shop could provide families with extra support during lockdown. We approached partners to help us provide vulnerable families with free Fledglings vouchers and themed boxes with sensory, behaviour and oral care products.



“Thank you so much for Matilda’s sensory box. We had a particularly tough day yesterday after trying to get her into school (sadly we didn’t manage this) then your lovely box arrived late afternoon and put a smile back on her little face.”

Laura Jackson, mum to Matilda



“Thank you so much to Fledglings and Contact for giving us these toys. I can’t put into words how big of a smile you have given me, and the joy on Nathan’s face.”

Addis Abraham, dad to Nathan

Grants for parent support groups

Thanks to funding from Pears Foundation and the Department of Culture Media and Sport, we led an emergency grant-giving programme to help parent support groups across England.

Enabling vital grassroots support

These groups are mostly run by volunteer parent carers and the grants enabled them to provide vital support on the ground. These grants make a huge difference to the day-to-day lives of families under hugely increased pressure due to Covid-19.

67
parent groups
received grants of
between £5,000 to
£15,000 totalling
£600K

How our grants helped families

The Childhood Tumour Trust used their grant to deliver virtual baking lessons and other fun interactive online activities to children like Elayna, aged 8 (right), who has a rare genetic condition called Neurofibromatosis Type 1.

Through the project we are also able to raise awareness of these small but vital organisations among our wider parent carer audience, and to support grantee groups with additional information and advice from Contact services.





Bringing families together online and off

Despite the challenges of covid, we continued to hold our family events online or socially distanced outdoors, to help reduce the isolation families were experiencing. 437 children and 762 parent carers attended our 104 family events, which included walk and talk events, virtual coffee mornings, online yoga, forest schools and storytelling activities. We look to our life-changing community of funders and partners to support this work and meet the growing demand for these crucial services.



Connecting parents on social media

We knew families were feeling more isolated than ever, so we launched a new private Facebook group for families to discuss their concerns and share their tips about family life in lockdown. At the end of March 2021 the group had 4,800+ members. What started as a way of staying in touch during the pandemic has grown into an amazing digital community of people who go above and beyond to help one another.



Supporting Parent Carer Forums during the crisis

Parent Carer Forums are groups of parents and carers of disabled children whose aim is to make sure the services in their area meet the needs of disabled children and their families. Contact's Parent Participation team supports Parent Carer Forums in all 151 local authorities in England. This year membership increased by 9.6% to an incredible 96,969 forum members.

We provide a dedicated adviser to help forums run their forum effectively. During 2020 the nature of this support shifted and intensified as forum leaders needed more personal support during the pandemic. We provided 7,421 hours of support to them during the year, well exceeding target. We also delivered 13 webinars with a total of 1,846 views.

Reaching out

As the country went into lockdown our face-to-face workshops, information stands, events, drop-ins and coffee mornings were rapidly transferred to a virtual environment.

Online learning for parents

We held 391 online workshops/ webinars, outreach or drop-ins (more than one a day) attended by 4,170 parent carers and 739 professionals. Our virtual support was featured on ITV News.

Practical support

Workshop topics were particularly relevant during lockdown. Families said they loved and needed our Money Matters, Sleep, and Behaviour workshops so we transformed them into virtual delivery, adding other topics parents needed as the pandemic continued.

Help for younger children

The number of parents attending Our Brighter Beginnings workshops, for parents with young children, almost doubled, in large part due to the flexibility of online workshops. And 97% of parents who attended them reported feeling better informed about how to get the support they need.



Left: Sue with daughter Sophie after getting the jab thanks to our campaign. Above: Campaigns manager Una on Channel 4 News.

500,000

family carers benefited from our Covid vaccine campaign to get early access to the jab.

11,500

supporters were enabled to take social action in our campaigns on the Covid vaccine for parent carers and disabled children and getting more financial support for families during the pandemic.

Campaigning with families through a crisis

The extraordinary pressures of the pandemic on disabled children and their families challenged Contact to advocate on an unprecedented level.

Plans for our campaigns and lobbying work quickly changed to focus on the issues that were most affecting families due to lockdown and the pandemic. And for the last half of the year we turned our attention to vaccines as the families we support were desperate for information and priority access.

Campaign win! Parent carers gain priority access to vaccine

In November and December 2020, Contact worked with a small group of health and genetic condition charities to campaign for all unpaid carers to be included on vaccine priority lists. Our parent-led campaign resulted in the Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunisation (JCVI) changing its guidance to include unpaid carers in priority group six.

Campaign win! Green light for the vaccine for vulnerable children

In February 2021 we carried out a survey about vaccines, to find out what families thought about vaccinating their children if one becomes available. Many families were desperate to get the vaccine for their vulnerable child. Media work about Covid 19 vaccinations for parent carers and disabled children led to coverage on Channel 4 News, BBC News, ITV Tonight, the Guardian and over 100 local and regional newspapers.

Supporting parents to campaign

Sue and Sophie Foreman have been incredible campaigners speaking out on behalf of others on BBC News and Channel 4 News. They joined Contact and many other families in calling for a vaccine for clinically vulnerable children, which eventually led to the government committee on vaccinations agreeing to some 12-15 year olds with underlying health conditions getting the jab.

Sophie, aged 13, loves horse riding and trampolining. The teenager from Nottinghamshire has Down Syndrome and during the pandemic she was told to shield because she could be seriously ill if she caught Covid. In total she spent 13 months at home, missing out on school and seeing friends.

Once the Covid vaccine was shown to be safe for 12-15 year olds, mum Sue was determined to get it for her daughter so she could get back to normal life. But she didn't expect to have to battle for it.

Sue said: "We felt utterly abandoned.



We'd been told to shield and done our utmost to protect our daughter. Suddenly everything opened up again, and they said clinically vulnerable people had been vaccinated, forgetting thousands of children and young people who had not.

"It was just so unfair and frightening. It was a relief to find a charity that understood what was going on and were fighting our corner. We were proud to work alongside Contact and other families to highlight the injustice of not offering the Covid vaccine to clinically vulnerable children. And I'm delighted that eventually we were given the green light."

Around the UK



Forest schools

It was the final year of our hugely popular Wales Forest School events, funded by BBC Children in Need.

Despite the major challenges of moving many of our forest school events online, we ran 8 digital sessions and 4 in person, exceeding our attendance targets. 192 children and 145 parent carers enjoyed our outdoor educational events.

Our fantastic Forest School practitioners James and Lea at Woodland Classroom ran sessions on wild berry foraging, making a journey stick, bird feeders and mini beast houses. Sessions were put onto YouTube.

We ended the project with a special session for the Chinese in Wales Association, who support families of children with ASD who wouldn't otherwise attend events due to language barrier issues, and had 12 children join us. Lots of learning and fun was had by all!



Northern Ireland

In the final year of our Me, Myself, I and Us wellbeing project, we held 23 events including Facebook challenges and online evening workshops, attended by 209 mums and siblings.

Scotland

We supported 1,126 families through our enquiries line, online workshops, information sessions and e-bulletins. We grew our support for families in hospital, with a new team member helping those when they need it most.

North East and Cumbria

We supported a pilot project involving parent carer forums in the North East and Cumbria working with the NHS to help reduce inappropriate exclusions and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and challenging behaviour. This led to positive change for many of the children, young people and the families who took part.

London

We ran face to face events in London when lockdown restrictions allowed including Pilates in the Park and walk-and-talk activities. These helped to reduce the isolation many families were experiencing.



Wales

Online workshops and webinars were delivered across Wales reaching over 300 parents. And parent trainees were recruited for a four month training programme to upskill parent carers.



Our awesome supporters

In a challenging year for events fundraising, we have been touched by the support of amazing individuals who ran virtual fundraising for us in all kinds of creative ways.

The first ever Virtual London Marathon took place on 4 October 2020. We were so grateful to our wonderful team of 23 runners who braved the pouring rain to run 26 miles in aid of families with disabled children. Together with all our marathon runners, they raised an incredible £37,809 to help us continue our vital work.

Community fundraising was difficult with the country in lockdown, but despite this our fantastic supporters raised £1,700 with bake-offs, challenges and our virtual Dinosaur Day.

And the your generosity continued throughout the year with individual donations, regular giving and payroll giving, raising an amazing £114,044.



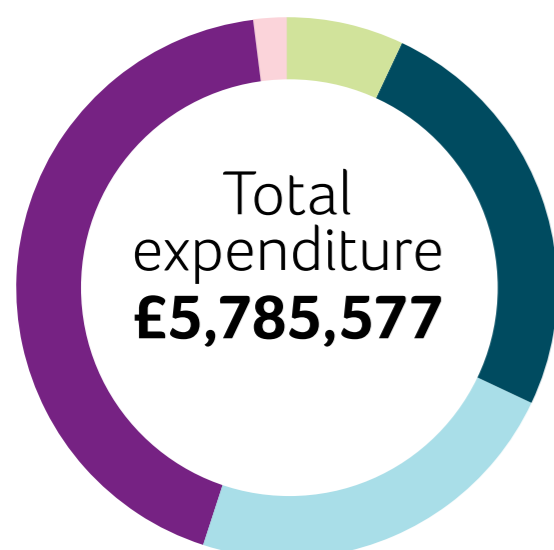
We launched the Contact Lottery, a fun and exciting way for people to help us continue our vital work. For just £1 per week, parents have the chance of winning up to £10,000 every week! After launching in June 2020, we were delighted to end the financial year with 662 players. Our first £1,000 winner, parent carer Vikki (left) from Aylesbury, said:

“It’s fantastic to know that my decision to play the Contact Weekly Lottery will help so many more families. It’s a wonderful feeling to know that you are helping others, and on top of that you get a chance to win some cash!”

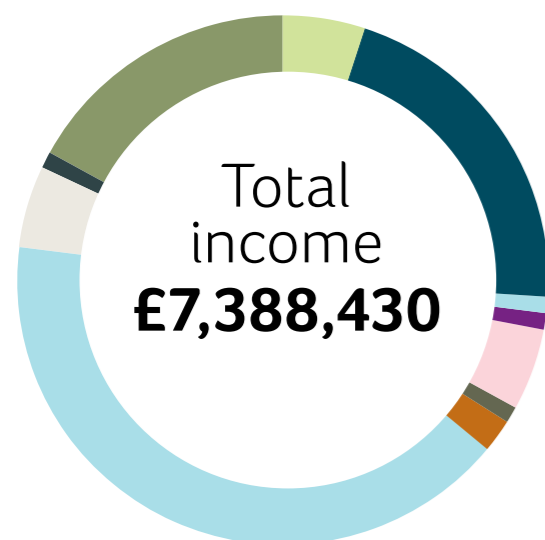


From left to right:
Jon Gratton, Faustina Asare, Karl and Chloe Easterbrook, Duncan McClure.

Our finances



- Raising Funds
£410,841 (7%)
- Supporting families – central information, advice and support
£1,450,002 (25%)
- Supporting families locally
£1,329,901 (23%)
- Bringing families together
£2,468,957 (43%)
- Helping families take action for others
£125,876 (2%)



- National Lottery Community Fund
£401,817 (5%)
- Charitable trusts
£1,587,705 (21%)
- Special events/other
£24,666 (<1%)
- Investment income
£19,569 (<1%)
- Individuals
£354,231 (5%)
- Local government grants
£65,449 (1%)
- Devolved nations government grants
£124,905 (2%)
- UK government grants
£3,100,272 (42%)
- Traded income
£349,279 (5%)
- Property income
£73,920 (1%)
- Sale of City Rd Headquarters in London to be reinvested
£1,286,617 (17%)

Our incredible funders

Grants and donations from the Department for Education, National Lottery Community Fund, NHS England, local authorities, companies, trusts and foundations and philanthropists enabled Contact to deliver our life-changing services. We are incredibly grateful to our funders for their flexibility, generosity and responsiveness during a challenging year which ensured we could provide our vital support throughout the pandemic.

The 29th May Charitable Trust
Annette Duvollet Trust
Arimathea
Baily Thomas Charitable Fund
Basil Samuel Charitable Trust
CAF Resilience Fund
D C Moncrieff Charitable Trust
D D McPhail Charitable Settlement
David Solomons Charitable Trust
Eleanor Harvey Charitable Trust
Elizabeth Rathbone Charitable Trust
Evan Cornish
Fidelity International Limited
Freddie Wakeham Charitable Trust
G.M. Morrison Charitable Trust
Gilander Foundation
Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Charitable Trust
Holskjaer Trust
Homelands Trust
Hugh Fraser Foundation
Iron Bridge Trust
Irving Memorial Trust
James Wise Charitable Trust
Jarman Charitable Trust
London Community Response Fund (City Bridge Trust)
London Community Response Fund (John Lyon's Charity)

Margaret McEwen Trust
Marsh Christian Trust
Maud Elkington
Mrs J B Woods Charitable Trust
PF Charitable Trust
Rest-Harrow Trust
Roger Raymond Charitable Trust
Savills
Sheila & Denis Cohen Charitable Trust
Sir James Roll Charitable Trust
Team Consulting
The Alchemy Foundation
The Ardwick Trust
The Belvedere Trust
The Britford Bridge Trust
The Brock Charitable Trust
The DM Charitable Trust
The Golden Bottle Trust
The Grace Trust
The Hemby Trust
The Lillie Johnson Charitable Trust
The Michael & Anna Wix Charitable Trust
The Peacock Charitable Trust
The Red Arrows Trust
The Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust
The White Top Foundation
The Yvonne Flux Charitable Trust



Get in contact


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We are Contact, the charity for families with disabled children.

We support families with the best possible guidance and information.

We bring families together to support each other.

We help families to campaign, volunteer and fundraise to improve life for themselves and others.



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**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**

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