Our Impact 2024/25

contact
For families with disabled children

A message from our Chief Executive & Chair

This year, Contact has stayed true to what matters most: being there for families with disabled children.

We've been unwavering in our commitment to families, offering trusted advice, information and support, and championing their rights through bold, collaborative campaigning.

We know the landscape is shifting. More children are living with complex needs and disabilities than ever before, and there are increasing diagnoses of autism and mental ill health. At the same time, families continue to face the twin pressures of a cost-of-living crisis and declining access to the services they depend on.

A steady hand for families

In this context, Contact has been a steady hand, helping parents find their way through an often complicated and under-resourced system. Over the past year, we supported a total of 381,000 families, each interaction a reminder of why our work matters.

Our helpline and regional teams have responded to growing complexity in the questions families are asking. We expanded our work supporting families whose children are in hospital and delivered more workshops than ever before, focusing on the issues that parents tell us matter most, from managing challenging behaviour to navigating educational support.

We are proud to continue our work with the Department for Education offering information and advice through our helpline and website, and to support parent carer forums across England. In Wales, new and much-needed funding allowed us to deliver a vital series of resilience-building workshops for parent carers - equipping families with tools to cope and feel more in control.

Through our work at Contact, and as a leading voice within the Disabled Children's Partnership, we've spoken up loudly and clearly on the issues families say matter most: the financial pressures they face, the need for accessible social care, and a fairer education system.

Thanks to our supporters, incredible staff team and our Board of Trustees, Contact's support has continued to make a positive impact in the lives of families with disabled children up and down the country.

Anna Bird, Chief Executive and Vanessa Longley, Chair

Our impact in numbers

Contact helped

381,000

parents with our trusted and valued information

16,287

enquiries answered via our helpline, our work in the devolved nations, plus local and regional programmes

781,854

unique visits to our website for valuable information

5,950

hours of support provided to parent carer forums

We reached

10,066

parents, 732 children and 2,459 professionals through our workshops, outreach sessions, information stands and family days

88%

of families felt more confident after receiving advice and support from us

Disabled teen 'achieved her potential in life' thanks to Contact's support

When Jeanette's daughter Rose was diagnosed with a genetic condition called Noonan syndrome, which affects growth and motor performance, the road ahead looked uncertain.

But thanks to the support she received from Contact over the years, Jeanette was never alone in her journey — and Rose was able to conquer many challenges in her life.

How Contact's advice and information helped

Jeanette told us:

"Rose has a learning disability as well as learning difficulties, growth and motor issues. I got advice from Contact's helpline about how to apply for an Education Health Care Plan for Rose so she could receive one-to-one support from a teaching assistant in mainstream school to access the curriculum.

"Contact's specialist advice and information also helped me apply for a children's and families needs assessment, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance.

Support to help Rose reach her full potential in life

"Rose's determination to overcome challenges led her to participate in dance classes and gymnastics as she was growing up, in which she later coached young children, which she loved. Rose went on to study childcare at college and is now in her first job as an early years practitioner, for which she has support through Access to Work. I am sure that Rose has managed to achieve her potential in life through accessing all of the support that Contact has recommended for her, and we are so grateful to them."

Help to feel more confident and informed

Fast-forward 19 years, and Rose is thriving: she's coached young children in gymnastics, studied childcare at college, and is now in her first job as an early years practitioner supported through Access to Work. Jeannette said:

"Contact helps parents like me to feel more confident and informed about my rights when it comes to supporting our wonderful disabled children."

"Contact helps parents like me to feel more confident and informed about my rights when it comes to supporting our wonderful disabled children."

We support families with trusted guidance, information and emotional support

After finding out their child is disabled families are faced with a maze of routes to support for their child and themselves. At a time of stress and emotional turmoil everything from getting a diagnosis, help with speech and language or getting equipment and adaptations to the home, as well as finding a suitable place at school, can become a battle.

Why Contact is needed

That's why Contact's support is more important than ever. Contact's advice and information services, provide families with information that is specific to them, helping to navigate those mazes.

At the same time our advice team, many of whom are parent carers themselves, provide much needed emotional support.

Our helpline responded to
9,851
enquiries

We had over
781,854
visitors to our website for valuable information

Helpline and online

Our team provided advice and information on a range of issues. Education and benefit enquiries were the key issues this year, followed by social care concerns.

Our telephone helpline remains the most popular way to reach an adviser, followed by email and live chat.

Help with education

Education enquiries included advice about SEN support in mainstream school, Education Health and Care assessments and plans, SEND Tribunal appeals and attendance.

Benefits advice

Benefit enquiries included DLA, followed by Universal Credit with a need for expert advice focused on managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit and helping parents to navigate the complexity of claiming benefits for disabled young people in education.

“Contact has been my lifeline”

How Maxine found hope and support to get her autistic son back into education

When school became unbearable for her autistic son Ethan, Maxine felt she had no choice but to take him out: “He wasn’t being supported to learn or enjoy school life,” she says. “It started to make him unwell, so I had to act.”

Ethan, now 14, has been out of school for two years. It was only after withdrawing him that Maxine discovered Contact. “I called their education helpline and the information was amazing. I just wish I’d found them sooner,” she says

With Contact’s guidance, Maxine began applying for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan to secure the support Ethan needs: “They’ve been with me every step of the way. As an autistic parent, I often find information overwhelming, but they always explained things clearly and checked I understood.”

After nine months, Ethan’s EHC plan has been finalised, and he’ll start a new school in September with the right support in place.

“Throughout this journey, Contact has been my lifeline,” says Maxine. “I know I can always turn to them.”

96% of parents using Contact’s helpline and website were satisfied, and **97%** recommend the service to others

Our Family Finance team responded to **785** benefits enquiries and made **424** in-depth call-backs for more complex enquiries

Family Finances

As a result of the team’s advice, families reported significant improvements to their family’s financial situation, with eligible families being better off by an average of £ 5,538 a year (£107 per week).

A top rated service

Following help from our Family Finance team, 100% of parents reported feeling better informed about their rights to benefits and grants and 99% would recommend the service to others.

In addition, our expert Family Finance advisers delivered two Facebook Q&As and two webinars supporting 148 parents, as well as created three new videos on Universal Credit.

> *“The system is so harsh and complicated. I’ve found it a struggle to navigate it all and at least I understand things a lot better having the chance to discuss things with you.”*
>
> **Parent carer**

Listening Ear

We offer hour-long telephone appointments to parents looking for a listening ear, emotional and practical support.

The Parent Advisers in our Listening Ear team are all parents of disabled children and young people and have a huge wealth of professional experience. They support parents struggling emotionally and looking for strategies to help them cope.

Parents use the service for the following reasons:

- **53%** needed emotional support or somebody to talk to
- **53%** wanted to speak to someone as their questions were complex
- **20%** preferred to speak to someone as they are not confident about online technology, suggesting that the appointments are helping some parents who are digitally excluded.

100% of parents rated the adviser's communication skills as Excellent or Good.

392 parents supported during hour-long telephone appointments

98% parents rated the adviser's knowledge as Excellent or Good

98% reported feeling supported and

82% feel less isolated after speaking to our Listening Ear team

> *"I couldn't recommend the Listening Ear service highly enough."*
>
> **Emma (right)**

Invaluable advice and empathy from a fellow parent carer

Emma is mum to Leo, aged 10, whose rare genetic condition KPTN is one of only 50 known cases worldwide. He is a wheelchair user, has severe epilepsy and global developmental delay.

Emma said: "I have used Contact's Listening Ear Service when at a low ebb following a new diagnosis for Leo. I was also struggling financially and housing-wise and I found it absolutely invaluable to receive the advice and empathy from a fellow parent carer who had already walked the same path that I was just embarking upon. I couldn't recommend the Listening Ear service highly enough."

> *"As well as the practical help, Contact's By Your Side team provides much-needed emotional support. It's just lovely to see a friendly, familiar face. During our four-month stay at GOSH, it was comforting to know that Contact would be there every Wednesday with information and support - and a smile"*
>
> **Esther-L, mum to Eva**
> **Read their story overleaf**

By Your Side

Our By Your Side team supports families who need hospital care in London, Newcastle, Birmingham, Liverpool and North Lanarkshire.

With the support of our highly experienced and passionate volunteers, the team are reaching more families in hospital, giving practical advice and information and providing emotional support. This year we spent more time at Evelina Children's Hospital as well as holding a second information stand in Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.

- We supported 2,413 families whose disabled and sick children need hospital care
- We gave advice and information to 784 professionals, equipping them to better help families who require hospital care.
- Following support from our By Your Side team 100% of families reported feeling better informed and 92% felt more confident.

100%

of parents said they feel better informed about how to get the support they need after help from our By Your Side team

Helping families in hospital

Esther-L is mum to 7-year-old Eva who has a bowel and heart condition and has spent long periods in Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital (GOSH). Esther-L told us:

"Eva is a happy-go-lucky little girl but her ongoing heart and other medical conditions mean that she sometimes has to spend lots of time in hospital – usually two weeks at a time. But the last time I spent four months at GOSH with her, and no one could have prepared us for that. To add to the stress, I was dismissed from my job as I desperately tried to juggle things at home, work, and hospital.

A chance meeting that changed everything

"During this long hospital stay, I happened to see Jill from Contact's By Your Side team setting up a table and putting out leaflets about the support they offer. I said hello, got chatting – and never looked back!

Vital suport at just the right time

"Contact helped me with practical things like filling in the Disability Living Allowance form, which has made an enormous difference to my family. They also pointed me in the direction of the Family Fund to see if there were any grants my family was eligible for. I was able to receive payments to help with things like travelling to hospital and laundry costs as a result. "

> *"Contact even put us forward to have Eva's wish granted through their partnership with Make-a-Wish UK. We spent a few days as a family at Disney UK, and both Eva and Zara loved it. It was such a special time for us."*
>
> **Esther-L, mum to Eva**

Online communities

We held nine extremely popular Facebook Q&As and Facebook Live sessions where parents put their questions to our parent advisers, enabling us to reach many at one time. Issues covered included Universal Credit, school transport, Education, Health and Care plans, Carers Allowance and help with council tax.

Social media

Our social media following continued to grow on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Youtube. Our private Facebook group provides a safe space for parent carers where they can support each other. We also launched new channels like WhatsApp, BlueSky, Threads and TikTok.

Podcasts

We relaunched our Helpful Podcast for Families With Disabled Children, moving to longer 20-30 minute episodes looking in detail at a top issue with a central host interviewing parents, Contact parent advisers and relevant guests.

Almost
25,000
members of our private Facebook group

68,000
subscribers to our e-newsletters, packed full of useful information

Almost
66,000
podcast and YouTube views

Parent carer participation

Parent carer forums are active across up to 153 local authorities in England; ensuring that the needs of disabled children and their families are prioritised in local, regional, and national decision making.

Throughout the year Contact's Parent Participation team provided 5,950 hours of support and delivered 11 online learning sessions during the year with a total of 301 live attendances and 3,754 online views.

Together with the National Network of Parent Carer Forums we ran the National Participation Conference with 195 attendees.

"The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) is proud to work in close partnership with Contact to strengthen support for parent carer forums across England. Through shared commitment to co-production, participation and meaningful engagement, this collaboration amplifies parent carer voices and ensures local experience informs national insight. Together, NNPCF and Contact play vital but distinct roles supporting forums and helping ensure parent carers actively shape services and policy."

HemiHelp

Contact run HemiHelp, the only condition-specific support group in the UK for families who care for a child with hemiplegia, a lifelong condition.

Connecting parents

In May, our HemiHelp team hosted a Better Together Family Fun Day for 20 families, offering connection and support for children with hemiplegia, their siblings, and parents. We also ran two well-received parent workshops just for our HemiHelp families.

We have

6,500

members of our HemiHelp Facebook group

2,500

people receive our HemiHelp online magazine

> *"Seeing kids where [my child] is now and their progress really gave us reassurance of how she can positively progress and overcome some of the challenges she currently faces."*
>
> **Parent of a child with hemiplegia**

Raising awareness of Hemiplegia

This year, we launched an updated online version of the HemiHelp schools pack aimed at teachers and other professionals who support children and young people with hemiplegia.

3,000

people have viewed our animation about how hemiplegia affects children

Supporting families around the UK

London

We were delighted to receive three-year funding to support **Lewisham** families with financial advice from City Bridge Trust. It includes a research project into how being from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic group affects how a child in London with SEND is supported in the education system.

We continue to support **Lambeth** families and this year secured funding to provide a fun day for parents and started a new project to support parents of young children aged 0-2.

Our **Ealing** team continue to deliver a huge volume of in-depth support to some of our most vulnerable families, over 80% of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds and some who are refugees and asylum seekers. We have increased our pool of volunteer translators and now offer support in five languages.

Our Helping Hand project, which supports families on the waiting list for a neurodevelopmental assessment, in the boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith & Fulham continued to provide vital support. Through this work we received funding for a two-year pilot project in **Hounslow** which has enabled us to set up an office in the borough supporting local families.

Nations

Our Nations teams in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales provide information, guidance and support to parent carers and groups across each country. Devolved governments and services mean the information differs across the UK and needs dedicated expertise.

Scotland

This year we supported 134 parents and 70 professionals with 364 enquiries from across Scotland . In addition, we delivered 28 information events reaching 565 parents and 377 professionals, including a webinar on Support without a Diagnosis in partnership with Children in Scotland. We have also increased our support to families with children in hospital with information stands at two hospitals, the University Hospital Wishaw Lanarkshire and Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital Glasgow.

Our policy work includes collaboration with Parenting Across Scotland and chairing the Getting It Right For Every Child Advisory Group bringing third sector and Scottish Government together to improve the lives of families.

Parents were supported via

6,436

enquiries and one-to-one appointments with regions, nations, By Your Side and London teams

6,626

parent carers attended a Contact workshop

643

children and

722

parents attended our family events

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland we finished the third year of our Preparing Parents for Transition, a difficult time for families when support for their child changes as they reach adulthood. This year we worked with six special and mainstream schools and two additional schools to deliver the support.

Wales

This year the team support 596 parent carers and created new resources that have benefited 926 families with disabled children in Wales. We launched our Building Resilience project in Wales, which includes a Wellbeing Programme for parents - in person and online workshops, drop ins and digital resources. The feedback from parents involved has been overwhelmingly positive.

Midlands and London

Contact has been delivering information and advice, as part of Autism Central, in the Midlands and London. Throughout the year we delivered 2,500 one-to-one's and 273 workshops and events covering topics including overwhelm, meltdowns and shutdowns.

> *"I've never had that support before and it really is priceless. Usually once you do a course it's over, and this continued support has been great. I feel that Contact genuinely cares."*
>
> **Parent carer**

Connecting families

Contact was started by a group of parent carers who came together to share their common challenges, joys and expertise. And today we continue to bring families together in multiple ways including family events, workshops, online and through our rare conditions work.

This year we held 65 family events including sports days, trips to the beach, science discovery centres and Beamish Open Air Museum. We also provided online yoga to parents to promote wellbeing.

Our parent workshops remain popular, often being fully booked within days. They are a chance not only to learn valuable information, but also for parents to chat to others in a similar situation. The sessions cover topics including understanding a child's behaviour, support for a child's anxiety and educational support.

We provided one-to-one advice and support to

1,186

rare conditions families and had

91,227

visitors to our medical information web pages

Rare conditions

Our work to provide support to families whose children have rare or undiagnosed conditions continued to be much-valued.

Over the course of the year 81 conditions were updated or added to the medical A-Z hosted on Contact's website and we supported families with in-depth help to connect them with medical professionals and families with children who have the same condition.

Tailored support from specialists

We helped 29 families of children with a rare condition with in-depth support from our Rare Conditions Officer. This tailored support involves seeking detailed medical information from our network of specialists as well as connecting families with others, sometimes globally, whose child has the same condition.

Bringing families together

We held our second rare condition conference in June which heard from parents sharing their experiences of living with a child with a rare condition as well as parent support groups.

New Rare Conditions Network

We created the Rare Conditions Network and resources to help the support groups and charities who are part of it. This includes a toolkit with advice and tips to manage volunteers, guidance on using social media, and our group action pack.

Influencing change locally and nationally

We supported parent carers to become powerful campaign voices, running media training for parents and encouraging them to tell their story.

We held seven focus groups on topics including the Law Commission's consultation on the reform of laws surrounding social care for disabled children, as well as school transport and attendance. Our campaigns reached major outlets such as BBC Breakfast, Channel 4 News, The Sun, The Mirror and Mail Online. Our Chief Executive continued to Chair the Disabled Children's Partnership, driving influential research and securing high-profile coverage including BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour.

During the year we inspired

13,677

parent carers to take action for others, including writing to their MPs, meeting government ministers

We secured over

60

mentions in the press

12

parent carers attended media training and

21

parent carers spoke to the media

Counting the Costs

We launched our flagship Counting the Costs research highlighting the financial situation for families with disabled children at a Parliamentary event (above). Ten parents spoke, sharing their experience and ideas for improving their own and other families' living standards. Their message to MPs and the Minister was loud and clear – things must improve.

> *"All our circumstances and children are different, but we're all fighting battles to get the support we need for them. We're so lucky to have the support of the fantastic campaigns team at Contact."*
>
> **Parent Changemaker**

Free school meal campaign wins top prize at charity awards

In July Contact and the Free School Meals campaign, set up by parent carer Natalie Hay, took top prize in the Disability category at this year's Charity Awards, the longest-running and most prestigious awards scheme in the charity sector.

Contact was recognised for our work supporting and amplifying the parent-led campaign to ensure eligible disabled children don't miss out on their free school meal.

We were honoured to be invited to a black-tie ceremony at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London, hosted by broadcaster, commentator and writer Baroness Ayesha Hazarika.

> *"Thanks so much for the opportunity to attend the media and parliamentary training. So informative and a much-needed time for me to learn new skills out of the house and away from my full-time caring role at home! I'm hoping those skills can be put to good use in the not-too-distant future."*
>
> **Parent carer**

School transport campaign

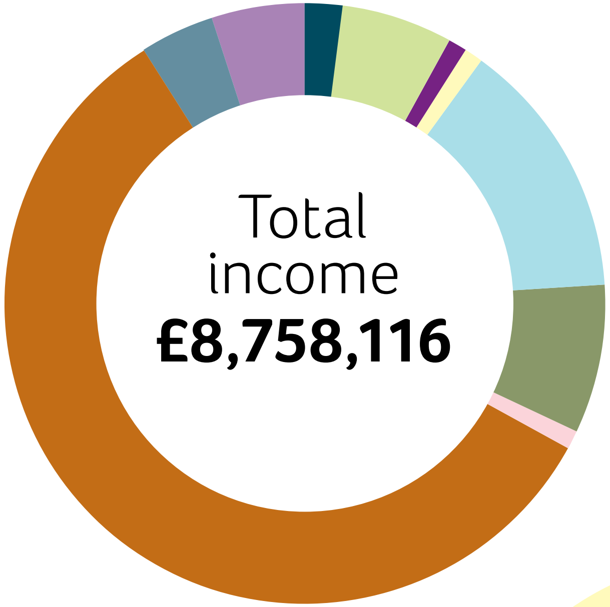
Our Transport Matters research revealed that almost 60% of disabled teenagers face changes to their school transport arrangements when they turn 16 with one in seven losing it altogether – jeopardising their ability to continue at school or college. Our campaign was featured on Channel 4 News

Empowering parents to speak up

Twelve parents received media training, boosting their confidence and skills in presenting and public speaking.

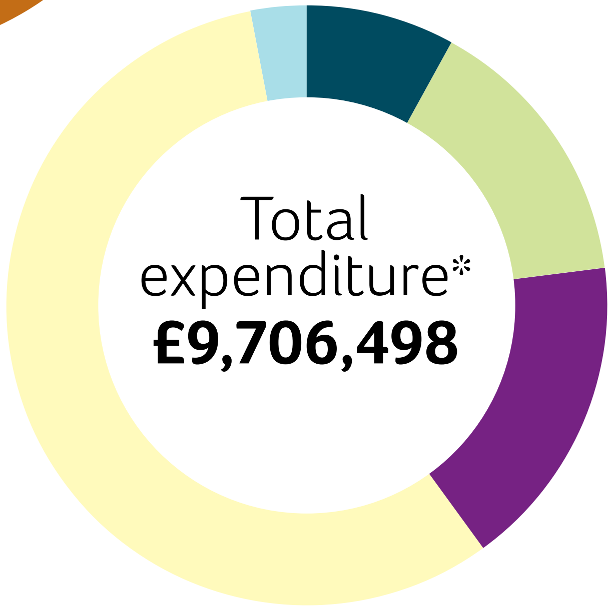
And throughout the year we gave 21 parents a voice to share their lived experience with national media on a wide range of issues, from the impact of rising energy costs, social care, school transport, Child Trust Funds and Free School Meals.

Our finances



Total income **£8,758,116**

- 🟦 National Lottery Community Fund £197,888 (2%)
- 🟩 Charitable trusts £357,265 (4%)
- 🟪 Special events/other £103,984 (1%)
- 🟨 Investment income £119,331 (1%)
- 🟦 Individuals £954,658 (11%)
- 🟫 Local government grants £809,856 (9%)
- 🟥 Devolved nations government grants £87,968 (1%)
- 🟧 UK government grants £5,613,681 (64%)
- 🟦 Traded income £513,485 (6%)



Total expenditure* **£9,706,498**

- 🟦 Raising Funds £890,827 (9%)
- 🟩 Supporting families – central information, advice and support £1,642,848 (17%)
- 🟪 Supporting families locally £1,693,503 (17%)
- 🟨 Bringing families together £5,173,301 (53%)
- 🟦 Helping families take action for others £306,135 (3%)

*includes planned expenditure out of reserves and designated funds to invest in key programmes and long term-sustainability.

Our awesome fundraisers

Our marathon marvels ran

470 miles

raising over

£43,491

Our roar-some family friendly and inclusive fundraising challenge Dino Day, raised over

£20,000!

with 372 families taking part

Paralympian and disability rights campaigner Tanni, Baroness Grey-Thompson did an In Conversation event in support of Contact. She was interviewed by broadcaster Jane Garvey during an evening that celebrated the work of Contact.

Superstar Hattie Mander cut her hair in support of Contact. Hattie, whose cousin, has autism, bravely decided to have the chop to fundraise for a charity that supports families whose children have additional needs.

Our incredible funders

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

We would like to take this opportunity to remember our committed donor Joseph Wright whose wonderful generosity supported multiple areas of our work and changed the lives of thousands before passing away in March. Our fantastic funders include:

Albert Gubay Foundation

THE Barbour FOUNDATION

Bolt Burdon Kemp

British Land

CITY BRIDGE FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY FUND

The David Family Foundation

dwf foundation

Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

W Garfield Weston

The Golden Bottle Trust

Hugh Fraser Foundation

IM irwinmitchell solicitors

SIR JAMES KNOTT TRUST

JOHN LYON'S CHARITY

London Community Foundation

Motability Foundation

Peacock Foundation

Pears Foundation

Roald Dahl Marvellous Children's Charity

SEVERN TRENT

William Leech Charity

Department for Education

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Order code i19

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.