



Royal Far West
Children's health, country-wide

**ROYAL FAR WEST WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2018 MENTAL
HEALTH AWARD FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE FOR COUNTRY
KIDS
'CONNECT FOR KIDS' TELECARE PROGRAM**

Today, 94 year-old children's charity **Royal Far West ('RFW')** received the "top gong" for its groundbreaking work in designing and delivering a world-leading mental health program – '**Connect for Kids**'.

At the **2018 Mental Health Month Awards today**, RFW won the *Excellence in Service or Program Delivery Award*. The Award recognises excellence and innovation in mental health related services, programs or initiatives that enhance the quality of life and well-being of people living with a mental illness. With a century-long history of providing health services to children living in remote and regional Australia, RFW is now at the forefront of connecting children outside of major cities to mental health support.

The Connect for Kids program is a mental health service for children aged 0-15 years, delivering access to specialist psychologists and mental health support via video-link.

The latest accolade follows RFW being awarded *The Outstanding Achievement Award* in July at the **2018 Australian Charity Awards**, for its '**Telecare for Kids**' program ('Telecare'). RFW Telecare was established in 2013 in response to the overwhelming needs of isolated and disadvantaged rural children, and has quickly grown to become Australia's longest continually operating child and family telehealth service.

"We are thrilled to win this Mental Health Month Award and to see our dedicated clinicians recognised for all of the vital work they're doing to help Aussie kids in country communities. Without our services and video-link technology, many country kids with mental health problems and vulnerabilities slip between the cracks – and the flow-on effects for many are manifold, long-term and potentially severe," said **Lindsay Cane, Royal Far West CEO**.

Geography should never be a barrier to services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, yet statistics show that children living in rural or remote areas of Australia are up to five times more likely than those living in urban areas to have challenges with their developmental health. More than 300,000 country children are already in need of help and this number only continues to grow – especially as drought compounds familial stresses for many.

"Speech therapy has traditionally been one of the main services RFW offers – and it remains our biggest support service. That said, mental health support has become our fastest growing need amongst rural children. The country kids we work with share similar and different pressures and anxieties that children in metro areas do – but the gap in access to mental health services between city and country kids is huge. And we are determined to close that gap!", added Lindsay Cane.

Royal Far West prides itself on offering life-changing early intervention services and 'Connect for Kids' illustrates the success of this type of approach.

"We're finding that early intervention – accessed years ahead of when they might otherwise have been able to seek mental health support from stretched services within country communities – is helping alleviate children going on to develop more serious mental health issues," explained Darya McCann, RFW Head of Service Partnerships.

When speaking about the mental health help and support her son has received from Royal Far West one mum said, "I read stories about families impacted by suicide. The parents will very often say they didn't see it coming. For me, I could see



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what was coming if my son didn't get help. It's still a long road, but with Royal Far West's support I can already see a shift - and that gives all of us hope.

To access **RFW Connect for Kids**, children need a GP referral and Mental Health Treatment Plan to make an appointment. They then connect to the service via the internet and a web-cam – either at home, their GP's office or school facility.

Connect for Kids is delivered in South Eastern NSW and the Murrumbidgee areas, primarily on the South Coast, Shoalhaven, Cooma, Yass, Goulburn and Crookwell regions through a partnership and funding with the Southern and Murrumbidgee Primary Health Networks. New funding is required to expand the service to new catchments.

On a yearly basis, RFW supports thousands of children from rural and remote areas, in Manly, in community, and via Telecare.

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