



Royal Far West
Children's health, country-wide

Application - Excellence in Service or Program Delivery Award 2018



About the award - Mental Health Association NSW (WayAhead) holds annual 2018 Mental Health Month Awards. The awards recognise excellence and/or 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.

About Royal Far West - Royal Far West is a charity that has been providing health services to children living in remote communities within Australia since 1924.

Geography should not be a barrier to services for disadvantaged children, yet children living in rural or remote areas of Australia are up to 5 times more likely than those living in urban areas to have challenges with their developmental health. With 32% of children in remote or rural areas of NSW unable to access the health services they need. More than 100,000 country children are already in need of help and this number only continues to grow.

About the program - The Connect for Kids program is a mental health service which allows children between the ages of 0-15 years to access psychologists via video link (telecare). Helping to connect children outside of the major cities to better mental health facilities.

Connect for Kids is accessible for children between the ages of 0-15 years and is suitable for children who have, or are at risk of developing, mild to moderate mental health issues e.g. behaviour anxiety and mood disorders that would benefit from short term counselling sessions. The child does not need to have a formal diagnosis. Connect for Kids takes a whole of child approach working with the family and/or caregivers to assist them in providing better support to the child. The program is delivered via telecare.

Families learn about the service from school, word of mouth or via their GP or PHN, and require a GP referral and Mental Health Treatment Plan to make an appointment. To participate the child and a parent or carer will need access to the internet and a web-cam. It can be accessed through home, GP office, or any other suitable location.

Once the child is referred, the child and their parent/carer will speak to a senior mental health clinician, who will then recommend the most affective care plan which is then delivered through telecare. This could be one of three care plans.

1. **Psychology clinic:** a one on one child and family based psychological intervention with psychologists.
2. **Structured programs:** a one on one or group based structured programs with the children and the parents/carers. These sessions tend to directly address different mental health issues, including conduct disorders and anxiety.
3. **Multi- disciplinary support:** an early intervention program delivered by speech therapists and occupational therapists which can treat the underlying factors influencing mental health. E.g. self-regulation, sensory processing, learning difficulties.

Program aims - This specialised mental health service (**Connect for Kids**) is delivered by Royal Far West's globally recognised **telecare for kids** program that allows children from rural and remote areas access to affordable and specialised paediatric health services through video technology. Being able to work in partnership with preschools, primary schools and local health professionals, offering a wide range of services to cater for all children. These include assessment, therapy and capacity building covering paediatrics, speech, occupational therapy and psychology disciplines.

Connect for Kids operates in south eastern NSW and Murrumbidgee areas. It is funded by the Primary Health Networks in the area ie COORDINARE: South Eastern NSW Primary Health Network and Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network under the Commonwealth funded Primary Health Networks program (PHN) which is one of 31 PHNs established across Australia. Their key objectives are to efficiently and effectively implement mental health services for clients, particularly those who are at risk of poor health outcomes. This ensures clients receive specialised care that is catered to their individual needs that focuses on consistent improvements to the coordination of the individuals care. This allows the individual to receive the right care at the right time.

How the program achieved its aims - This specialised mental health service is delivered by our globally recognised telecare for kids program that allows children from rural and remote areas access to affordable and specialised paediatric health services through video technology. Being able to work in partnership with preschools, primary schools and local health professionals, offering a wide range of services to cater for all children. These include assessment, therapy and capacity building

covering paediatrics, speech, occupational therapy and psychology disciplines. Telecare has been delivered to over 900 clients in 102 schools and communities in NSW and Queensland. With 85% of our clients meeting or exceeding the therapy goals and 93% of parents recommending these services to other parents. Telecare is also proven to be as effective as face to face intervention.

More information about Royal Far West Programs is [available on our website](#).

Summary of evaluation data, outcomes and formal/informal feedback - Connect for Kids has received 171 referrals from both Murrumbidgee PHN (97) and South Eastern NSW PHN (74) in the 2017 financial year.

- 85% of children are meeting or exceeding their therapy goals
- 93% of parents would recommend this service to other parents
- 77% of these children would not have had their needs met otherwise

The majority of mental health expenditure is targeted at adults, but most problems begin in childhood. Conduct problems (CP) are the most frequent cause of referral to child/adolescent mental health services and the most reliable precursor of all adult mental health issues. There is an effective evidence-based treatment for these children, but in Australia, less than 24% of children who require treatment access evidence-based interventions (National Mental Health Survey: Sawyer et al., 2000). The percentage for rural children accessing treatment is far lower. The main reason for this is a lack of available local services.

RFW and the University of Sydney are partnering to develop an eHealth intervention for child conduct problems. Supported by a five-year National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) partnership grant, with Professor Mark Dadds and his team, we are developing and implementing this innovative service model, then evaluating the benefits of therapy-assisted online health of children between the ages of 0-9 which is delivering improvements in outcomes for children with conduct problems in rural and remote communities.

- Phase 1 involved developing, implementing and evaluating Access EI as an innovative, e- health intervention for rural families of children with conduct problems.
- Phase 2 aimed to increase the level and sustainability of access to treatment providing training to a broad base of clinicians to enable them to provide support to rural families with children with conduct problems.

The research aims to evaluate the efficacy of the [AccessEI model](#) in a randomised controlled trial compared with treatment-as-usual. Results will be published late 2018.