



# Symbol Family Support Services Ltd



## Assessing Vulnerable Parents



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## 1. Introducing Symbol

“Symbol exists to create choices for individuals and innovative effective solutions for organisations. We strive to work in partnership with others to improve the quality of knowledge and opportunity for those we support.”

Symbol began in 1988 with the aim of bringing together service users, skilled practitioners and commissioners to develop innovative services that enrich the lives of vulnerable adults and of children with special needs.

Symbol works with people who experience disadvantage or vulnerability to support them to develop their skills and confidence, to make choices about how to live their lives and to improve their opportunities to engage with and contribute to the community.

### 1.1 Symbol Family Support Service

Symbol provides specialist safeguarding, support and assessment services for families where parents are vulnerable; we bring together a unique, specialist, multidisciplinary team of expert practitioners and the available evidence base to ensure that, where concern exists, parents have their parenting potential assessed, supported and understood.

Symbol provides an evidence based service for families, either in the community or on a residential basis, where there is concern that the family may not be able to provide a good enough standard of care for their children due to, for example:

- Learning disability
- Physical disability
- Sensory disability
- Young age
- Mental health issues
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- The parent’s own history of being parented
- Disruptive social networks

The majority of parents we work with have a cognitive disability and/ or are very young, specific details of our work with these groups are included in this brochure.

### 1.2 Our Philosophy

All parents, whatever their disabilities or vulnerabilities, must be able to offer a safe, secure and nurturing environment for their family. Every child has the right to a family life, which recognises and meets his or her physical,

emotional and psychological needs. Symbol therefore ensures that the best interests of children are paramount in all we do, whether it is long term support for families in the community or assessment of parenting capacity at our Ofsted rated “Outstanding” residential family centres.

*External professionals say, ‘I enjoy working with this service because the staff are professional and competent. They always put the needs of the children first.’*

*Parents can be reassured that the service operates openly, honestly and realistically, with the welfare of the child based at the heart of its practice.*

**Quotes from 2010 Ofsted reports**

*Integral to all recommendations is the welfare of the child; in both the short and longer term.*

*Central to all activities is the welfare and protection of the children.*

**Quotes from 2014 Ofsted report**

## **Our Approach**

Where concern over parenting exists every person has the right to have their parenting potential assessed, supported and understood.

Our clients benefit from skilled sensitive assessment and support from an expert multi-disciplinary team.

The best assessment and support works in collaboration with the client’s own local professional network.

Clients benefit from honesty and transparency; we ensure that they understand the targets set before them and the goals to reach, in order for their parenting to attain a ‘good enough’ standard. We do not avoid difficult issues.

Our emphasis is on identifying difficulties and seeking solutions through skilled intervention. Where solutions cannot be found then our role is to evidence this in our practice in order to assist families, Social Services and the Courts to reach accurate, fair decisions that serve the best interests of the children.

For most people with special needs and additional vulnerabilities the task of parenting is a challenging one and we need to understand that the potential for long-term neglect is ever present. In many cases, this potential may be ameliorated by the successful intervention of services.

Service provision should be viewed in the long term. There are no short, sharp solutions for achieving parenting for people with special needs and vulnerabilities.

## 2. The Service Model

Symbol offers assessment, support, or a combination of both service elements. We consider the needs of the adults in their own right as people who are vulnerable and their potential to parent their children.

Our services are tailored to meet the needs of individual families and their supporting services. Sometimes it is appropriate to assess a family's skills within their own home, and in this case our community assessment team may be utilised. Clients receiving community assessment/support may attend a centre on a daily or overnight basis.

In other cases a residential based assessment and support service is required. Some of our families begin their time with us on a residential basis and we complete our assessment once they return home. We have a semi support service that provides a staged return home or a less supervised assessment model.

Our residential services are based in Kent and serve clients from all geographical locations throughout the UK. Our community teams also work across a wide geographical area as required.

The Symbol team considers the needs of families and this includes parents and their children. Given the expertise within our team we are able to offer advice concerning the developmental progress of the children we meet and provide advice on the parenting needs presented by children who themselves have developmental delays and special needs.

Whether our service is provided in our unit or in the community we aim to build an environment, which enables the professional team to make sound, robust recommendations for each family's future.

### 2.1 Working with Families

All written information, including reports, is shared with families unless, exceptionally, this would put a child or vulnerable adult at risk.

Families are invited to attend monthly reviews and encouraged to seek feedback from their key worker and Centre Manager at any time.

Families are assisted to enlist the support of their legal and citizen advocates as appropriate.

Information is shared in the style appropriate to the learning needs of the client.

Each clients' cultural background, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious beliefs are respected and accommodated.

## 2.2 Professional Framework

Symbol services are multidisciplinary; a specific team of professionals is assembled around each family, according to their needs, after an initial meeting and assessment.

Each member of the Symbol multi-disciplinary team has an identified role and is subject to explicit joint working arrangements to avoid duplication, maximise information and share knowledge.

Close multi-disciplinary team liaison takes place on an ongoing basis, including through weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings and fortnightly Assessment meetings.

Multi-disciplinary plans are used as a basis for assessment, intervention and support.

Professionals within the Symbol team seek further opinions and support from specialist agencies as required to ensure the quality of their provision.

At the time of discharge from a Symbol residential family centre families returning to the community have full transfer reports with clear liaison set up between the Symbol Family Support Service and local Social Services agencies.

Through interagency working we aim to ensure that parents with special needs are able to cross organisational barriers with ease and without undue bureaucratic intervention.

Symbol respects the confidentiality of information it holds and discloses it only with the consent of the parents or where a justifiable breach may be assured.

### 3. Parents with learning disabilities

Symbol has been delivering specialist parenting assessments where one or both parents has a learning disability or learning difficulty since 1998. ☐

Our assessments are based on the evidence base concerning the parenting difficulties, styles of intervention and possible outcomes for parents with special needs; the research data tells us that parents with special needs face a challenge in parenting their children, which has the potential to lead to unintentional long-term neglect but that this may be ameliorated by appropriate intervention.

Symbol assessments determine the nature of the appropriate long-term intervention for each family and identify the potential for this intervention to enable children to safely, securely, and happily remain within their own families.

In order to identify and provide appropriate intervention for parents with central cognitive impairments we first gain a clear understanding of their learning needs and styles to ensure that the most effective learning takes place in the shortest possible time. We then consider the parent's potential to maintain their learning throughout the child's minority years and to adapt to the child's changing needs as they grow.

Symbol staff work alongside families, using a behavioural approach, to change behaviour and deepen understanding.

Where children are not able to stay with their birth parents we aim to ensure that parents understand why, for their own future well-being. We also identify the adults' own needs for support within the community.

*Parents confirm that their experience of the service is inclusive and informative. Great emphasis is placed upon the known and preferred communication styles and needs of parents.*

**Ofsted, 2014**

*The team is qualified and experienced; able to conduct a fair and realistic assessment of parents with a primary diagnosis of a learning disability, some with additional mental health difficulties, with regards to their capacity to effectively parent their children. ☐*

**Ofsted, 2010**

*The organisation has an excellent track record for meeting the requirements of service users with complex learning styles. ☐*

**Ofsted, 2009**

## 4. Young/teen parents

40% of the parents who have been assessed by Symbol since 1998 have been under the age of 21 and many under 18. As a result Symbol has developed a wealth of experience and expertise in assessing young parents

Concerns have existed as to these young people's ability to learn; many have been unsuccessful within the education system leading to poor educational attainment and resulting low confidence. Many lack confidence in their ability to take part in any structured learning situation and are avoidant of such situations.

The assessment of young parents, many of whom have a care background themselves, presents specific challenges and the need for an intervention based assessment programme. The assessment needs to be multi faceted to gain the necessary evidence regarding both the needs of the children and the ability of their parents to meet these needs.

The assessment process requires a specific set of skills as a consequence of the immaturity of the parents and, frequently, a lack of good quality parenting models. Symbol has developed an appropriate assessment process with the need to assess the parent's social adaptation skills and manage challenges of personality and behaviour

A percentage of the young parents referred to Symbol have a diagnosed learning disability and others have borderline or low average abilities. Undertaking detailed cognitive assessments forms part of our assessment process where this has not been clarified prior to entry.

From 2012 Symbol is able to offer Local Authorities and the Family Courts a self-contained unit, "The Hebe Centre" at Newington Manor in Kent, for teen parents who may or may not have a learning disability.

Young parents referred who do have learning needs may be assessed in the Hebe Unit or in the main learning disability Unit within the Centre depending on their prevailing needs and their assessed level of vulnerability.

Young people under 18 are allocated a Case Mentor who leads a dedicated team to support the young person in their own right and in their assessment as a parent. Such assessments will be subject to weekly review and a typical programme of 1:1 support throughout the first part of their assessment. Young parents may be admitted with or without their children who may visit for their part of the assessment rather than be resident.

A formal multi agency review meeting is convened at the mid and end

points of the assessment.

As an Outstanding Ofsted Provider, we are registered to take teenage parents of all ages including under 16's.

## 5. Safeguarding Placements

These are short-term placements, without assessment, as an alternative to mother and baby foster care.

Safeguarding placements are available during the decision making process prior to an assessment, after an assessment has concluded and prior to the identification of suitable long-term accommodation or as stand alone placements in their own right.

During a safeguarding placement Symbol provides full supervision of children and accommodation for families. Detailed records and observations are maintained and day-to-day support is provided to families for the purposes of safeguarding.

Safeguarding placements are made, initially, for 7 days and can be extended as required.

Where assessment is instructed after a safeguarding placement has been made an additional fee applies. The information collected during the safeguarding placement informs the opinions later reached during the assessment.

## 6. Parenting Assessments

Symbol Family Support Services offer a variety of assessments to provide instructing parties with as many options as possible for accessing our service, suitable for parents in a variety of situations.

All assessments are completed with a report complying with the April 2008 Practice Direction in respect of experts issued by the President of the Family Division of the High Court.

Members of the Assessment Team are available for professionals meetings and are experienced in giving evidence in court.

*Absolutely delighted with progress. Very impressed by level of support from Symbol – all working together for the welfare of the children. Absolutely satisfied by everything I've read – it is right. ☑*

**Judge C., Family Court**

*Please pass on our thanks to [Assessment Team member] for attending yesterday. This was much appreciated. My colleague who attended yesterday was very complimentary about how she gave evidence. ☑*

**J L, Solicitor, April 2011**

### 6.1 Paper Based Assessments

Paper based assessments advise parties, as far as is possible on the basis of paperwork, if a Symbol assessment is appropriate for their client and if so which type or types of assessment should be considered.

Whilst paper based assessments do not replace our full preliminary assessments as a detailed means of assessing the suitability of families for further assessment they do provide our initial view. Paper based assessments may be useful where funding or time constraints do not allow for a preliminary assessment or where parties are in agreement about the need for further assessment but would like to have an opinion on the form that assessment should take.

Dependent on the specific nature of the instruction, the paper based report will be written against our own criteria as used in Preliminary Assessments, based on the full bundle of information supplied to us.

We do not normally attend court where we have only undertaken a Paper Based assessment as we have only reviewed information provided by others and therefore have no new evidence.

## 6.2 Preliminary Assessments

Preliminary assessments provide clear recommendations concerning the appropriateness of further detailed assessment and whether such assessments should, in our opinion, be undertaken in a residential or community setting. Approximately 60% of our Preliminary Assessments result in us offering further assessment.

Preliminary assessments are undertaken whilst families remain in their current residence/s, this includes situations where families are living together in the community and where the child or children have been placed in foster care.

A Preliminary assessment will usually be undertaken by two members of the Symbol Assessment Team and will include the following:

- Review of the filed documents pertaining to the family.
- Interviews with the parent or parents.
- Observations of parent(s) contact with their child/children.
- Possible interview with Foster Carer.
- Discussion of the case and formulation of an opinion at an Assessment Team meeting.

A full report is written against the following criteria, as they are applicable to the parent/s, in addition to responding to specific questions agreed with instructing parties :

- The presence of a learning disability that has the potential to affect a person's ability to parent adequately;
- Whether a person has already received specialist intervention;
- Whether a person has undergone any other form of assessment utilising full and accurate information concerning the person's learning style, ability and deficits;
- Whether we are able to offer anything over and above that which has been offered to date and whether a person would benefit from the assessment and teaching strategies we have developed;
- The presence of other factors which may reduce a person's potential to parent, for example additional disability, ill health, mental health need, number of children to be cared for or the availability of appropriate housing;
- A person's ability to work with the professional network;
- The presence of disruptive personal networks;
- An individual's personal history and experiences of being parented;
- The length of any separation of parent and child/ren and the prejudicial effect of this on any permanent placement;
- The requirement for, and availability of, appropriate long-term

support.

- Whether the parent has had access to a full and fair assessment of their parenting potential;
- The parent's potential to care for their child in the long term.

A Community Preliminary Assessment may be combined with a Cognitive Assessment undertaken by a member of our psychology team.

## 6.3 Full Assessments

Full assessments are usually undertaken after a preliminary assessment (by ourselves or other parties). Assessments are structured in accordance with our Letter of Instruction and the individual needs of families. Full parenting assessments can be undertaken on a community or residential basis, over a 6-week period.

Full parenting assessments are provided on both community and residential basis. In determining which is most appropriate we consider the needs of each individual family and their supporting services. Ensuring appropriate safeguarding of the child or children is paramount but we also consider factors including potential disruption of children and the need to assess parents over 24 hour periods. We are able to be highly flexible in combining elements of our services; some families begin their time with us on a residential basis and we complete our assessment once they return home, others come in for a residential period to be assessed in relation to concerns that remain after having had some community based assessment whilst still others have a community assessment combined with over night stays or extended contact sessions in our residential centres.

The rehabilitation of clients, with their children, in the community, is considered a successful outcome of a parenting assessment. This was the outcome for 41% of the families who had a full Symbol parenting assessment from 2006-2013. We also consider an assessment successful when a parent, with support, decides to end a placement and put the needs of their child over their own. From 2006-13 this was the outcome of 17% of our full parenting assessments.

### 6.3.1 Community Assessment Service

Symbol has always offered assessments within the community but we now consider that given the information coming out of our own and national research and the overall needs of families and commissioners, we need to promote this style of working with families and create a dedicated team to provide these services.

Community assessment has the potential to reduce disruption for children and adults and eliminates the potential need to extend an assessment period where a need for follow up community assessment is identified during an initial residential period.

Community assessment utilises and assesses a family's engagement with their local community resources and allows for robust assessment of their local social networks.

Where we are able to work with families prior to the removal of their children, or to fully supervise contact at the family home, we can undertake assessment in "real life" and "real time" contexts.

### **What do we offer?**

The primary aim of the Symbol parenting assessment service is to provide a skilled multi-disciplinary assessment of vulnerable families where there is concern over their ability to parent their children. Additionally we provide support, therapy and teaching in order to assess the parents' potential to parent their children with appropriate support, we determine the nature of any long-term intervention the family requires and identify the potential for this intervention to enable children to safely, securely and happily remain within their own families.

The most important person in the assessment is the child and it is our view that any parent, whatever their disability, background or circumstance, must be able to offer a safe, secure, nurturing environment for their family if they are to have their children in their care.

We assess:

- The unique needs of the child or children concerned;
- The parent's ability to meet the child's basic and practical care needs, developmental needs and emotional needs;
- The parent's co-operation and Engagement in the Assessment Process;
- The parent's compliance with the requirements of the professional network;
- The parent's level of personal self control;
- The parent's level of vulnerability and understanding of risk of others to themselves and their child;
- The parent's understanding of the concerns of the Local Authority;
- The parent's capacity to participate in reciprocal relationships and demonstrate empathy within relationships with others, in particular with their child;
- Any other matters highlighted within the letter of instruction.

In order to undertake the assessment we carry out appropriate activities

from the following list:

- Review of all documentation supplied, by our multi disciplinary assessment team;
- Initial planning meeting with representatives of the commissioning authority to agree the focus for the assessment and the Assessment Plan;
- Interviews with parents and other influential adults, undertaken by 2 members of the Symbol Team;
- Parent/child contact observation sessions (at varying times of day and both announced and unannounced for those children living at home);
- Observations of children within their educational, foster or early years settings;
- Meeting with the extended family and significant others in the family network;
- Task observations;
- Supported attendance at local resources;
- Support and intervention, to enable assessment of cooperation with advice, and capacity to make and maintain change to be assessed;
- Further specialist assessments such as Speech and Language therapy assessment, Occupational therapy assessment and psychological assessment of parent/s, where appropriate to assess the needs of parents and ensure that the parenting assessment is appropriately tailored to the parent's individual needs.
- Immediate reporting to the local authority and agreement of a plan of action should safeguarding concerns arise.
- Review meeting with parties and interim reports as required;
- Final professionals meeting;
- Full and final report.

### **Families together at home**

Where required, in order to provide safeguarding or 24 hour assessment Symbol is able to provide up to 24-hour support within the family home or at times within foster homes. Our community Support Programme runs from our Community Team HQ at Woodlands Farm, Paddlesworth Road in Snodland. Our community families live in their own properties either in local housing or in our own provided accommodation. They are visited for scheduled support hours. The service is provided under the Kent Supporting People Initiative with additional funding from Local Authority Children's Teams.

Where families have been assessed in our Residential Family Centre at Newington Manor in Kent, we may be asked to provide short term move on accommodation and we are able to do so within the building at Woodlands Farm. We have three housing units available in that property. The families

who use this accommodation will be visited by the community team if we are asked to provide a support service. The families will register with the local GP and Health Visiting service and attend local sure start services.

Additional visiting assessment hours can be commissioned for families living in community properties including Woodlands Farm. Where families are living in their own homes and requiring transitional support or assessment, this can be commissioned by instruction but it not routinely available. All clients receiving our community support have access to an out of hours support line. In emergencies necessary referrals will be made to statutory services.

### **Children in foster care**

Symbol is flexible in observing contact within existing arrangements and recommending any extensions to contact required for assessment purposes.

### **Parent and Child Foster placements**

Symbol are experienced with working with parent and child foster placements having assessed families within such settings for the past 13 years. Symbol assesses within the foster placement, working closely as required with the foster carers who are with the family 24 hours a day. This may include providing training to the foster carers and involving them in the target setting and recording process and offering advice and supervision at every stage of the placement.

### **How much does the Symbol Community Service Cost?**

The Symbol service is flexibly designed and costs reflect this with no two assessments being the same. This is a bespoke service but we aim to undertake the work within a realistic cost framework appreciating the need for cost effective and realistically priced services. We are always happy to discuss prospective assessments and to provide assessment plans and cost schedules. We aim to provide an cost estimate within the same or following day of your enquiry. These costs are then firmed up dependent upon the final letter of instruction and the unique nature of each assessment commissioned.

Assessments are typically undertaken over a 6 week period but we can provide reports within less time if this is appropriate or undertake extended assessments again, where the needs of the children suggest this is more effective.

### 6.3.2 Residential Assessments

Symbol operates a residential centre in Kent.

We provide a positive, warm and nurturing environment where families can experience the value of family life, mix alongside other families going through the same process and begin to understand their role in parenting their children. We assess each parent's ability to understand the needs of their children and to begin to meet those needs. Where families have to face difficult issues and choices within their own family life, our team is on hand to work through this process and to assist them in placing the needs of their children first.

The service is delivered via a small staff team who each bring their own unique skills to this assessment process. By ensuring a small dedicated staff team, children are not exposed to multiple carers and the family is enabled to develop and maintain their primacy of care with their own child. Children attending our Residential Service do so in the care of their families, and the family at all times retain the care of their own child. The role of the support team is to facilitate this care, to assess its underlying nature and to examine the effect of skilled intervention upon their parenting abilities. In essence we are considering parenting potential.

During their stay in our unit, the members of the Family Support Service will work with clients in individual and group sessions and undertake structured and informal observations. In identifying key targets for change and monitoring the adult's response we are able to identify the changes that have been achieved. We identify the specific strategies required to support intervention and review any change we observe in parenting application.

The Symbol Family Service core residential team is supported by the Assessment Team, the members of which are regularly and consistently working within the unit. This team includes a Specialist Consultant Clinical Psychologist, a Research Psychologist, Senior Social Workers, Specialist Speech and Language Therapists, a Specialist Health Visitor, Consultant Occupational Therapist and a Nurse Advisor. These personnel, in the main, undertake the primary assessment and prepare reports for Court proceedings.

During their stay in our unit, the members of the Family Support Service will work with clients in individual and group sessions and undertake structured and informal observations. In identifying key targets for change and monitoring the adult's response we are able to identify the changes that have been achieved. We identify the specific strategies required to support intervention and review any change we observe in parenting application.

Our service is based upon evidence. It is based upon the research data, which informs us as to the parenting difficulties, styles of intervention and possible outcomes for parents with special needs. Our underlying philosophy is based on a behavioural approach, which enables us to work alongside families to look at changing behaviour whilst creating deeper understanding.

Many of our families will have central cognitive impairments. They will need assistance with learning, and a clear understanding of their learning needs and styles will enable us to ensure that the most effective learning takes place in the shortest possible time. Centrally, we consider their potential to maintain this new learning throughout the child's minority years and to adapt to the child's changing needs as they grow.

We aim to develop skills in the adult to enable them to live more successfully within the community; to care for themselves, to maintain their financial position, to budget, to cook, to maintain a healthy, happy environment both for themselves and their families as they grow. Many of our families will not have enjoyed good extended family support, and part of our role is to determine the support that may be required that may otherwise come from an available extended family.

Our support staff team includes individuals with child related qualifications and experience such as Child Care Awards, Nursery Nurses, and adult related skills such as Master's degrees in Analysis and Intervention for people with learning disabilities, psychology degrees and specialist care backgrounds in, for example, autism.

**Pre-Admission:** ☐

We read full documentation concerning a family and undertake a Preliminary assessment where required. Where at all possible clients visit the Centre. We gather Information concerning a child / or children's routines, likes, dislikes and personal care needs.

**On Admission:** ☐

A planning meeting is held with key professionals to share updated and detailed information and to agree the process of the assessment. ☐ Clients are welcomed by the Manager on duty, given assistance to unpack and provided with a Residents Guide and the Statement of Purpose; these are talked through with the client who has the opportunity to ask questions.

Within 3 days of arrival each client is allocated a Key Worker, initial support in connection with arranging finances is provided and clients are shown around the local area and key venues including the GP Surgery, clinic and grocery shops.

Clients prepare a Placement Agreement with their key worker within 7 days of arrival.

**Assessment:** ☐

A detailed assessment schedule is prepared within seven days of arrival; baseline results are shared at a Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting and a schedule of specialist assessments with, for example, the clinical psychologist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist, drawn up. ☐ Findings concerning the agreed assessment areas are reviewed weekly at Multi-Disciplinary meetings.

Families attend the local health clinic for fortnightly checks with the health visiting team.

**Review:** ☐

Parents are reviewed weekly and children's needs reviewed on a daily basis. Any concerns are reported to the key worker without delay. Family key workers prepare a noted report on each child in their care. ☐ If at any point the team are concerned as to the progress of the family or the occurrence of concerning incidents, the Multi-Disciplinary Team is called to meet and concerns formulated and shared. An early discharge will be considered.

**Reporting:**

An interim Advisory Statement is available at week 3 of the 6-week assessment and a Recommendations Statement is available within 24 hours of the Final Review Meeting which is held at week 5. A Final report is filed 7 Working days after the residential placement has concluded.

Final reports include the following information:

- Qualifications and experience of the authors
- Key dates in the assessment process
- Summary of the assessment process
- Family composition
- Results of the assessment of 'the child'
  - Assessment of 'the child's' developmental progress
  - Assessment of 'the child's' attachment to their caregiver
- Results of the family assessment (completed for both parents if present and assessed)
- The individual's co-operation and engagement in the assessment process
- The compliance of 'the individual's with the requirements of the professional network
- The individual's level of self control
- The individual's aptitude for learning and consolidation of that

- learning within the assessment period
- The individual's level of vulnerability
- The individual's capacity to make and maintain constructive relationships
- The individual's capacity to participate in reciprocal relationships and demonstrate empathy within relationships with others
- The individual's potential to learn and sustain new repertoires of behaviour
- Answers to questions posed in the Letter of Instruction
- Conclusion
- Recommendations
- Appendices, including specialist Occupational and Speech and Language Reports

**Discharge:**

Assessments are usually completed within 6 weeks.

### **6.3.3 Assessments for Parents where children continue in alternative placements**

A significant percentage of families (21%) are referred for full assessment by Symbol after the separation of parents and children. A review of assessments undertaken with this group of clients suggests that, for many, there is no case to be made for the child or children to be disrupted from their foster care or extended family placement to join their parents at the Centre initially. In some cases it may be appropriate for children to be admitted to the Centre at a later date if the initial assessment of their parents indicates a likely positive outcome to the assessment as a whole.

This type of assessment is relevant where the information we require for the initial assessment can be gained through assessing the parent on their own and through contact sessions (held either at the existing venue or on our premises). We are able to assess the parent in terms of factors such as:

- Psychological functioning
- Personality assessment
- Social adaptation and adjustment
- Daily living skills
- Impact of personal history
- Networks and relationships
- Ability to access and accept long term support
- Attachment and bonding between parent and child
- An assessment of the children's needs and match with parental capacity

This type of assessment programme is available within separate designated accommodation on our Newington Manor site or, where parents do not require 24 hour supervision or where we do not require assessment data over a 24 hour residential period, within Symbol community based accommodation in Kent. In this latter case we undertake a community assessment of the adults with the accommodation element funded as a separate facility. Such an assessment may be arranged on a 5 or 7 day a week basis. The provision of accommodation is designed to assist parties instructing us in the effective use of resources in terms of travel, and on occasions to provide required accommodation. Parents attend our Centre on a visiting basis and are also assessed within the accommodation provided.

## 6.4 Semi- Supported or Transitional assessments

Community or residential assessments in which the level of support likely to be available to the family, after assessment, at home is replicated by Symbol.

Symbol is able to assess the parent/s' capacity to parent their children replicating the support, which may be available to them in the community. Families are placed in designated, separate accommodation on the sites of our Centre in Kent, or within Symbol community based accommodation, provided with scheduled and "Pop in" visits and supported to access community resources. Should families require additional support Symbol staff are available 24 hours a day. ☒

Whilst families can enter our Centres directly for a Semi Supported assessment it is most often used for families who have previously undertaken a full assessment with us.

## 6.5 Psychological Assessments and Cognitive Psychometric Assessments

### **Cognitive Assessments:**

The intellectual ability of a person is assessed based upon the results gained from the administration of a standardised psychometric instrument, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, IV Edition.

This assessment provides the reader with details of a person's verbal intellectual quotient, performance skills (i.e. Non verbal IQ) and an overall IQ score.

The narrative places the scores within an overall banding of ability and provides summary information as to the impact and implication of the

assessed level of ability upon a person's functional abilities and acquisition of new skills.

Each Cognitive Assessment is accompanied by an interview with the psychological team to confirm that the person's functional performance is in line with the assessed level of ability.

### **Psychological Assessments:**

In addition to a cognitive assessment as detailed above the psychological assessment includes an interview with our Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and a review of available documentation.

## **7. Symbol's Residential Family Centre**

Our Centre provides specialist full and semi-supported residential assessments for parents with additional needs and vulnerabilities.

Symbol develops its provision on an ongoing basis to respond to the needs of those who commission us and in response to feedback. Early in 2014 we made the decision to centralise our residential provision within a single centre, increasing the time for which our range of specialist assessment team members are available on site; the accommodation in the residential centre has been restructured to provide distinct areas to meet the needs of different groups of families and different types of assessment. The centre works with a maximum of eight resident families at any one time.

Our Kent based Centre has an Outstanding Ofsted rating. Families enter our Centre from all over England and Wales.

Symbol's Residential Family Centre is accommodated within Newington Manor, Newington, Kent. It is housed in three separate buildings; a cottage, a chalet building and the manor house itself. Newington Manor is a 16<sup>th</sup> century building and also houses, separately from the residential accommodation, Symbol's head office and training facilities.

Each family has its own bedroom and bathroom. Children over the age of four are accommodated in their own separate bedrooms unless otherwise felt appropriate by the Court or professional team. All family rooms have en-suite bathrooms.

All buildings have shared kitchen and living space consisting of lounge and dining room areas as well as staff office, staff sleep-in room, storage areas and a staff bathroom. The Head Office space in the Manor House provides adequate facilities for interviews, group work and meetings to take place.

The accommodation is surrounded by a large garden, which has designated play areas for the children.

The decorations and furnishing within the house are homely and residents are encouraged to personalise their rooms and communal areas. We hope that the home provides a warm, pleasant environment for the families staying there. The environment is specially designed to enable families to feel a sense of high self-esteem and to be an environment, which can be translated to their homes back in the community.

*“Staff at Symbol are really, really helpful.”*

Parent

*“They [Staff] are always there to if you need to talk to them.”*

Parent

*“I was really nervous when I first came here, but the staff and other families made me feel really welcomed straight away’, and, ‘It’s like living with a group of good friends, we’re all here for the same reasons.”*

Parent

*“I know I have to show what I can do but I am also getting a lot of help.”*

Parent (Quoted in Ofsted Report, 2014)

## 8. The Assessment Team

At Symbol we have an unrivalled multidisciplinary, expert team. Our Assessment Team includes a consultant grade clinical psychologist, senior social work practitioners, health visitor and nurse advisor, specialist speech and language therapists and an occupational therapist.

Our Support Team is made up of experienced and qualified staff from a wide range of disability and child care backgrounds. Key to our team is the client's existing professional network, so as to aid transition and ongoing support. At our residential service families are supported on a day-to-day basis, by a skilled support team experienced in working with adults with special needs and young children.

Our Community Support team offers short term, assessment and long term community support programmes. Many families who have progressed through our residential services continue to use our community support service, which includes housing, support and advice.

### TESSA DUFFY – Managing Director

Tessa Duffy is the Managing Director of the companies within the Symbol Group; Symbol UK Ltd and Symbol Family Support Services Ltd having established the Symbol Services in 1994. Tessa qualified as a speech and language therapist in 1982 and since that time has provided services to adults and children with disabilities. Following the publication of the seminal work 'Communicating Quality' Tessa was awarded a Fellowship of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. Tessa holds Post Graduate Diplomas in the Psychology of Mental Handicap and Family Assessment and in Child Studies and is currently enrolled in the Masters Child Studies Programme at Kings College, London. Tessa has focused her practice around Safeguarding and Parents with disabilities for the past 30 years, within health, social services and independent provisions.

### ALEX HALL – Senior Assessment Team Member and Business Development Advisor

Alex Hall is a qualified and registered Speech and Language Therapist with a Master's degree in management. Alex has developed, managed and delivered multidisciplinary services for people with special needs and disabilities for over 10 years in each of the statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors. She has been working within Symbol's Parenting Assessment Service since 2009 and currently leads on community assessments. Alex's particular areas of interest include parent child relationships, social interaction and emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. In addition to her clinical work Alex advises, within Symbol, on service and business development and quality.

### **JACQUELINE STONE – Nursing Advisor**

Jacqueline Stone is a Registered General Nurse and a Specialist Health Visitor for people with Learning Disabilities. Jacqueline has over thirty years experience as a practitioner working with children and families. Jackie leads the Community Support Service at Symbol.

### **HEATHER HINTON – Social Worker**

Heather is a qualified and registered social worker (1991) with over 20 years experience working with vulnerable adults. Heather has previously managed residential homes for people with learning disabilities.

### **JUDITH REEP -Consultant Occupational Therapist**

Judith combines her role at Symbol with NHS employment as a consultant OT. Judith has an MSc in Interprofessional Health and Social Studies and is also currently enrolled on a part time PhD course in Health and Social Care.

### **Eleanor Ferris - Clinical Psychologist**

Dr Eleanor Ferris is a HPCP registered Clinical Psychologist. She completed her Doctorate at Canterbury Christchurch University in 2013. Eleanor has over 10 years experience of working in the NHS, undertaking work within range of settings including Counselling Services, Psychological Therapy Services, Residential homes for Older People and those with learning disabilities, Mental Health Community Teams and Hospitals. Eleanor is a member of the assessment team at Newington Manor Residential Centre. She currently works a Clinical Psychologist in Sussex Partnership NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Eleanor also has 8 years of previous experience of working in therapeutic residential communities for Looked After Children. She qualified with a Post Graduate Certificate in The Care and Development of Young People in 2001.

### **GRAHAM FLATMAN – Consultant Clinical Psychologist**

Graham is a Chartered Psychologist having a BSc in Psychology, a Master of Science in Educational Psychology, a Post Graduate Certificate of Education, a Diploma in Ericksonian Hypnosis, Psychotherapy and Neurolinguistic Programming (British Hypnosis Research). He has worked in Local Authorities for seventeen years and in private practice for seventeen years; he is an expert in the assessment of learning difficulties.

### **CHLOE DEEBLE-ROGERS – Centre Operational Manager**

Chloe Deeble-Rogers is the Centre Operational Manager for Newington Manor Residential unit and has a BA (Hons) degree in Psychology from Bristol University. Chloe has experience of working with adults and children with learning disabilities and works directly with children and families. Chloe is currently undertaking further study of the Master's programme in Child Studies at Kings College in London. Chloe holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Child Studies from Kings College.

### **LUCY BERRY - Research Psychologist**

Lucy Berry is a member of the Assessment team in Symbol. Lucy was the Centre Manager for our Bristol Residential Family Centre and now is a senior member of our Community Assessment Team for the West and Central England. Lucy has a BSc (Hons) in Psychology and an MSc in Neuropsychology.

### **Tina Kitcatte - Nursery Nurse**

Tina Kitcatte qualified as a Nursery Nurse in 1979. She has had experience at the Symbol Residential Family Centre and is now a member of the Symbol Community Assessment Team. Tina has extensive experience working in hospitals and community settings working with children and parents with a range of additional needs. Tina has a wide range of experience working with people who have suffered trauma and anxiety and who would be considered vulnerable families within the safeguarding practice area. Tina is an experienced professional with expertise in working as a member of a specialist multidisciplinary team.

### **Cressida Zielinski - Health Visitor**

Cressida Zielinski is a Registered General Nurse and a Health Visitor with over thirty years experience of working with children and families. Cressida has a post graduate diploma and MA in Childhood Studies at Kings College in London. Cressida has worked as a senior health visitor and safeguarding children advisor and for the last ten years has worked as a Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children in mental health, community and acute hospital settings. Cressida is the lead for child safeguarding and child protection at Symbol.

## 9. Referrals and enquiries

The form at the end of the brochure can be used to make an enquiry, advise us of a likely referral or to make a firm referral.

We can be contacted through our website [www.symbolfss.org](http://www.symbolfss.org) or by telephone, email, post or fax:

Telephone: 01622 859216

Fax: 01622 859462

Email: [michelle.wickens@symbolfss.org](mailto:michelle.wickens@symbolfss.org)

Address: Dickley Court, Dickley Lane, Lenham, Maidstone, Kent, ME17 2DD

### 9.1 Time scales

During the first half of 2012 we reviewed our assessment process and reduced the time scale for a “standard” full assessment to 6 weeks in response to the expressed wishes of many of our commissioners. This was possible because in recent years we are receiving a much greater amount of information relating to clients, at the point of referral than we previously did.

We are often able to commence full residential and community assessments as soon as we have received the necessary documentation and Letter of Instruction. Please do telephone to confirm our current availability.

Paper based and preliminary assessments can usually be completed within 2 and 4 weeks of instruction, again please telephone for current timescales.

### 9.2 When to contact the Head Office:

All referrals and enquiries and written correspondence should be addressed to the Head Office.

Please contact the Head Office for all matters relating to a client’s assessment, including organisation of meetings, filing of reports and Court attendance.

Should you wish to contact a client within our unit, or speak to a member of the assessment team about the status of an assessment, please contact the FSS Administrators at our Head Office who will take a message for you. Unfortunately, we cannot always re-direct phone calls to the unit. You will appreciate that the support teams within the unit are busy with clients, and cannot always answer the telephone. To ensure that your calls are dealt with efficiently, please contact the FSS Administrators who will ensure that your call is handled in the most appropriate way.

## SYMBOL FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES LTD REFERRAL FORM

Please complete this form as fully as possible and return to Symbol Head Office by post or via fax on 01622 859462

**Please note the instructing authority/solicitor has direct responsibility to arrange payment with our terms of payment.**

### DETAILS OF INSTRUCTING BODY

Solicitor / Local Authority Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Fax No: \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Purchase Order / Reference No: \_\_\_\_\_

### DETAILS OF FAMILY

Parent(s) Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) D.o.B: \_\_\_\_\_

No of Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Ages of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Status of Children:

Unborn Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

With parent

With family member \* Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

In Local Authority care \* Placement Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Please indicate weekly contact schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate number of adults expected to be included in the assessment \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate number of children expected to be included in the assessment \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PARENTS

Has parent been diagnosed with a learning disability?

Yes / No

Please provide WAIS Scores

Verbal \_\_\_\_\_

Performance \_\_\_\_\_

Full Score \_\_\_\_\_

Has parent been diagnosed with mental health problems?

Yes / No

Please provide specific information

Does parent have any issues with alcohol or substance abuse?

Yes / No

Please provide specific information

Does parent have a criminal record (spent or unspent)?

Yes / No

Please provide specific information

Please outline the main concerns surrounding this family:

**ASSESSMENT SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

Has parent had any previous assessments? Yes / No

Please indicate what type and date of:

Please indicate the volume of Documents for this family: \_\_\_\_\_

At this time, what type of Assessment do you consider you require?  
(More than one may be indicated)

Please refer to our Brochure for full details of our assessments.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper Based Report      | <input type="checkbox"/> Lone Parent     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preliminary             | <input type="checkbox"/> Teenage Parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community               | <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Residential Preliminary | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated             |  |

Please indicate the desired filing date: \* \_\_\_\_\_

\* Filing date will be confirmed upon receipt of letter of instruction

Please advise dates of Court Hearings and what type of Hearing this is:

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\* Members of the Assessment team are not available for Court attendance unless requested in writing

Please provide any additional information to help us process your referral