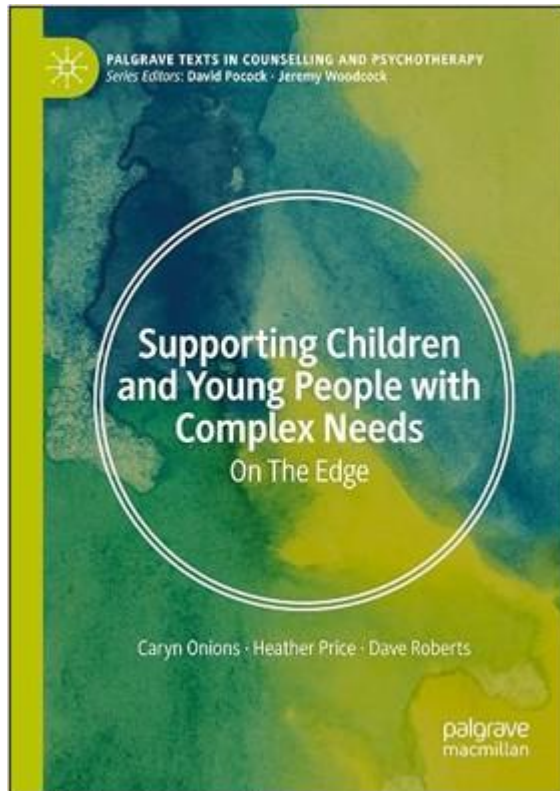


**SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS: ON THE EDGE
(PALGRAVE TEXTS IN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY) - BY CARYN ONIONS (AUTHOR),
HEATHER PRICE (AUTHOR), DAVE ROBERTS (AUTHOR) (2026)
FOREWORD BY PATRICK TOMLINSON**



Being kindly asked to write this foreword was especially meaningful to me. Firstly, the Mulberry Bush School is one of the most outstanding and long-standing therapeutic organizations for children who have suffered trauma in the UK and the world.

Secondly, I began my work in 1985 at the Cotswold Community in Wiltshire, England. At that time, Barbara Dockar-Drysdale was the consultant child psychotherapist who did so much to shape the work of the Cotswold Community. Previously, she had been the founder in 1948 and consultant of the Mulberry Bush School in neighbouring Oxfordshire. The Cotswold Community, when I was there, always considered the Mulberry Bush to be twinned, so there is a long-standing feeling of connection.

Foreword – Patrick Tomlinson

The first children to live at the Mulberry Bush in 1948 would now be 90 years old, and some of them are potentially great-grandparents. When I first became involved in therapeutic care for children who have suffered trauma and other adversities, we talked about breaking the cycle of deprivation and abuse, so that young people who had suffered might flourish and raise their children healthily. In this sense, the value of breaking the cycle goes on from one generation to the next. The founder of the Mulberry Bush, Barbara Dockar-Drysdale, and her husband Stephen, and those who have followed, have much to be commended for.

The work of the Mulberry Bush and its founder, Dockar-Drysdale, has spread far, through the light that has been shone on the possibility of growth and recovery from the most adverse childhood circumstances. As well as the children who have benefited, the same is true for many of those who worked with them. I had the good fortune of working with Dockar-Drysdale when she became the consultant child psychotherapist at the Cotswold Community, a residential therapeutic Community for boys. I remember when she was asked in a team consultation if she believed in life after death. She answered that she believed that we live on through the people who have internalized something from their connection with us.

When the work is written about, there is another opportunity provided for people close and afar to learn something of value, by reflection and thinking about their own experience. What is written and recorded can always be revisited or found for the first time decades later. Dockar-Drysdale and others, more recently, such as Richard Rollinson, Christopher Reeves, and John Diamond, have carried on this tradition. And of course, as referred to in this book, the work of Donald Winnicott had a huge influence on Dockar-Drysdale, the Mulberry Bush, the Cotswold Community, as well as many other therapeutic residential care organizations. More widely across the world, Winnicott may be best known for the term he introduced in 1953, the 'good-enough mother' or parent, which has influenced the way we think about the role of parents.

The task in the here and now of enabling children to recover from serious adversity, to grow, and to flourish is always our main concern. However, we can never underestimate the knock-on benefits for everyone who is involved, what they learn, and how they develop. And how their journeys will touch upon the lives of so many others who may never have set foot in the Mulberry Bush School. In this way, the continuing existence of the Mulberry Bush for nearly eighty years offers a beacon of hope.

This book is complete as the Mulberry Bush nears its 80th anniversary. In one way, it carries on a tradition but also adds something creative and new. There must be a reason why the Mulberry Bush has lasted so long when so many other allied organizations are sadly no longer with us. As well as having generations of dedicated and effective leaders and staff, from the start, the Mulberry Bush has had a clear model of how to work with children. Like any successful organization, they have also adapted effectively throughout the decades, with many ups and downs, and serious challenges, I am sure. In an organization like the Mulberry Bush, a core aim is for everyone to learn from experience. Ainsworth and Hansen (2008, p.44) claimed that residential services need to be "dynamic living and learning environments". This book, alongside the history of the Mulberry Bush, is a great example of such a 'place'.

This book covers the key elements involved in therapeutic work. The chapters are well chosen and provide a coherent whole. The authors combine many excellent case illustrations to bring alive the nature of the work with children, young people, and their families. They also make it clear that we must pay significant attention to the support and development of the staff, whatever their role. Emphasis is placed on the value of making sense of what may seem and feel unthinkable. The overall approach is fundamentally relational. The authors combine attachment, psychodynamic, and neuroscience theories to help understand the needs of the children and the impact of the work.

The book effectively moves between the details of work with children and macro issues of the organizational context and research. The authors make it clear that there must be reflective processes, and these must be modelled at all levels of the organization. In the introduction of the book, Price and Onions ask,

What is the state of mind needed to hold the 'mess' when things go awry? By 'state of mind', we are focusing on the state of mind of the organisation and/or team and/or member of staff.

In many ways, the book is an answer to this question at all levels, from the individual worker to the organization. We need to be as well prepared as possible to provide and maintain a receptive state of mind. If we are not well prepared, traumatized young people will most likely recreate the states of mind they are familiar with. Such as ones where reactivity, detachment, and sometimes harsh punishment may have been too common. This book encourages us to aim for a state of mind where we can pay thoughtful attention. Attention and presence that is kind and curious, that can remain calm amongst turmoil, that can adjust and adapt, in the way that the Mulberry Bush has embedded in its culture for nearly 80 years.

Reference

Ainsworth, F. and Hansen, P. (2008) Programs for High Needs Children and Young People: Group Homes are not Enough, in, *Children Australia*, vol. 33, no 2, pp. 41-47

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<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-032-16699-9>

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