

CHATTER FROM THE WILLOW

Vol 2



WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY

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Sarah playing with neutrals | Sarah Carter
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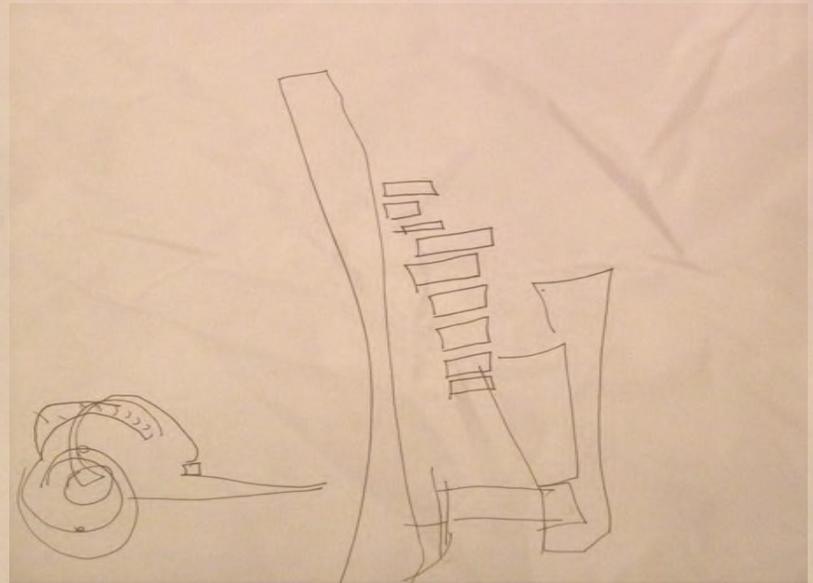
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The creation of this zine began on January 13, 2020, at a well loved art table, in a well loved art gallery: Rodman Hall Art Centre in St. Catharines, Ontario. With all the creative minds seated at this table, not one of us could have predicted the conditions that this zine was completed under. We have been creating, compiling, and connecting from our homes, during a world crisis.

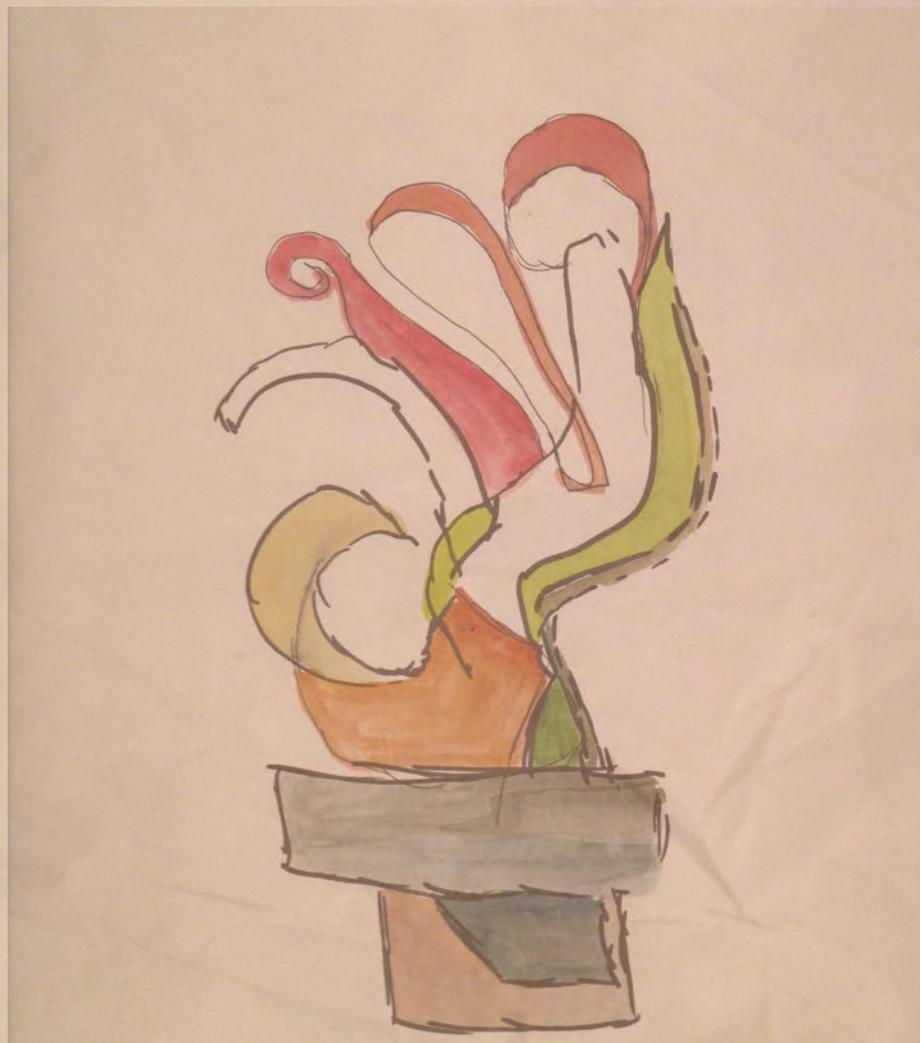
This is the work of tenacious and resourceful mentally ill/recovered artists and creatives. It is my privilege to provide a platform for these voices and viewpoints, and it takes a compassionate community to embrace and accept.

Reader, thank you for doing your part.

With love,
 Shauna MacLeod
 Founder/Director (and fellow Member Artist)
 Willow Arts Community



pen | Sarah Carter



watercolour with sharpie | Sarah Carter

Willow is the fruitiest organization this side of Texas. Rodman is the erupting facility for blooming volcanoes of potentiality. We strive for illuminating night's artists and voices to speak and express collectivity.

Willow @ Rodman Hall is a sense of structure and serenity. Getting away from the hustle and bustle of life to connect and create with other human beings has been a healthy, positive experience so far.

Rodman Hall as the epicenter for the Willow Arts group is extremely important. Firstly, it offers a space that has history. The historic building is a creative catalyst. Secondly, the fact that it is a working art gallery offers inspiration in every room. It gives the individual artist a safe place.

Coming to Rodman Hall for the Willow is often the best part of my week. It refreshes me, I feel energized. It is the source of creativity and imagination. I love the building and the grounds. I love the sense of history and belonging I feel at Rodman Hall. I enjoy meeting new friends and catching up with old friends.

Well, to me it's a chunk of my day, a few hours to release energy and creativity that a lot of the time stays bottled up during the week. It's a place to connect. It's a spot to learn grow, and challenge myself not only as an artist, but as a person as well. I love the sense of community, and that all who enter the red door are accepted.

Rodman Hall is a place of history represented through art. The Willow has reconnected me with people in my community and with art. I will continue to grow positively as part of the group. It is a place.

Bringing the Willow to Rodman Hall and being embraced within its walls has meant the world to many artists living with mental illness or substance use. We have a space to belong, to create, to reach out to the public and families, friends. We discover ourselves here. We explore the arts here. We belong somewhere where we matter and can express ourselves.

It means that we have "a room of our own" that Virginia Woolf told us was necessary for all women writers, but if I may suggest, what all writers, artists, healers need. Rodman Hall is a beautiful, functional space which connects the best of the past through art and open community, with the hopeful light of the future and the grounds are our garden and the trees are earth.

Rodman is the garden I like to return to regularly to see what changes or doesn't, what repeats or not, to cuddle the season. Each exhibition is a journey, a new season, a delight from inside, a story. Rodman is a conversation for us all, a shared space, a rare form of happiness, the drawing of our minds, a place of reflection.



the words of Willow Member Artists

mental health

freedom	balance	balance
connection	walking	freedom
harmony	organized	calm
happiness	health	balance
happy	constant	art
frustration	mindfulness	laughter
ideal	everywhere	creation
stability	everything	success
balance	understanding	

freedom expression outlet release
 intensity lifeline release expression
 creativity **art** soul peace
 expression passage
 spiritual fantastic
 Exploratory chaos escape soothing
 escape spirit *creativity* expression
 liberating therapeutic freedom

mental illness

darknessdysregulationempty
 imbalanceimprisonmentlight
 restlessbarriersempylonel
 ychaossicknessimbalance
 mis understandingdistressdarkn
 esstruggledebilitationpai
 nlonelinessquicksandmirror
 disorganizationdisorderrea
 lityscary



RADIANT COMA
 AND CRINGING FEAR,
 STRICKEN LOSS,
 SMOTHERED DANCE,
 FROZEN CRAWL
 UNDERLINING DEPENDENCE,
 OVERWHELMED ATTACHMENTS,
 INADEQUATE ANXIOUSNESS,
 KIND OF DELICATE HOT.
 TERROR IS THE TITLE.

Adding Words to Words

Adversity & an Adventure
in Self-Reflection

Letting go of Anger
Getting over Loneliness

Falling Down
& the Pain of rising again
& putting Distance between us
& Hate

Between us & Fear

& coming together again
& getting ourselves

No matter what gets to us

Dear Insane Definition,

You claim: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result." Over and over I find myself looking at this, hoping it will make sense, be adequate, yet each time I find it more lacking, incomplete, short-sighted, and untrue.

Isn't it equally insane to repeat the same action and expect the same result?

A person rubs two sticks together, having only gotten them to smoke. Day after day, they try again, rubbing the sticks together until finally there are flames. To what point were they insane?

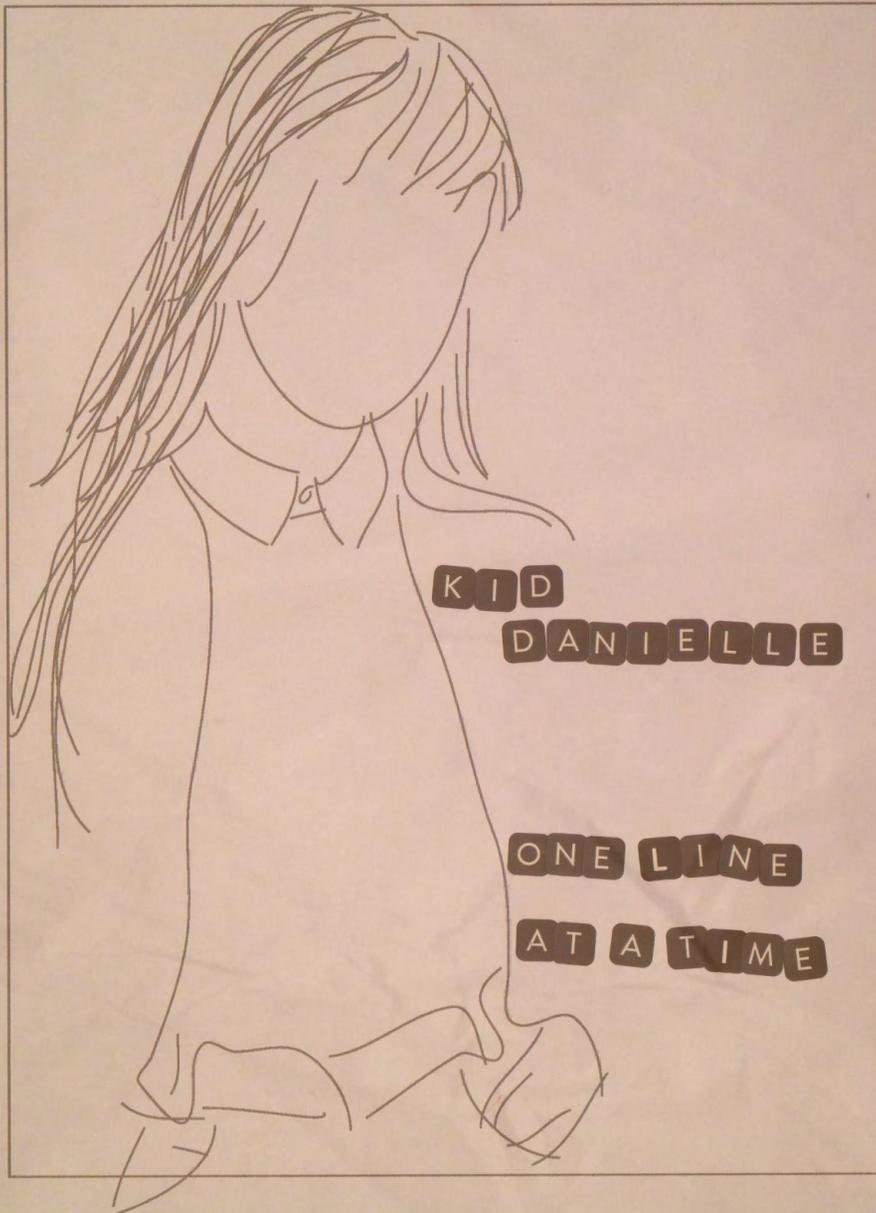
I make a recipe that turns out delicious, so I make it again, but it turns out to be a complete disaster. I must be crazy.

What did I do differently? Is it even possible to do the same thing again? The first time you do something, you are learning, the second time things get easier, or at least you kind of know what to do. They say the third time's the charm. Knowing that practice makes perfect, that you have to try several times to get things right, that beginners' luck wears off, I will continue to reconcile these ideas.

I must have seemed bonkers bringing a feral cat home and being so nice to him when he was terrorizing my little one-room apartment. I still have scars from that adjustment period, but I kept on loving him. He's still a bit of a nut, but a nut I can pet and pick up, a nut who gives me affection.

Maybe what's actually insane is to try to define such a word.

Sincerely,
A Member Artist



What's real

He lives on the streets,
He looks lost & confused.
His reality, my reality,
Not the same.

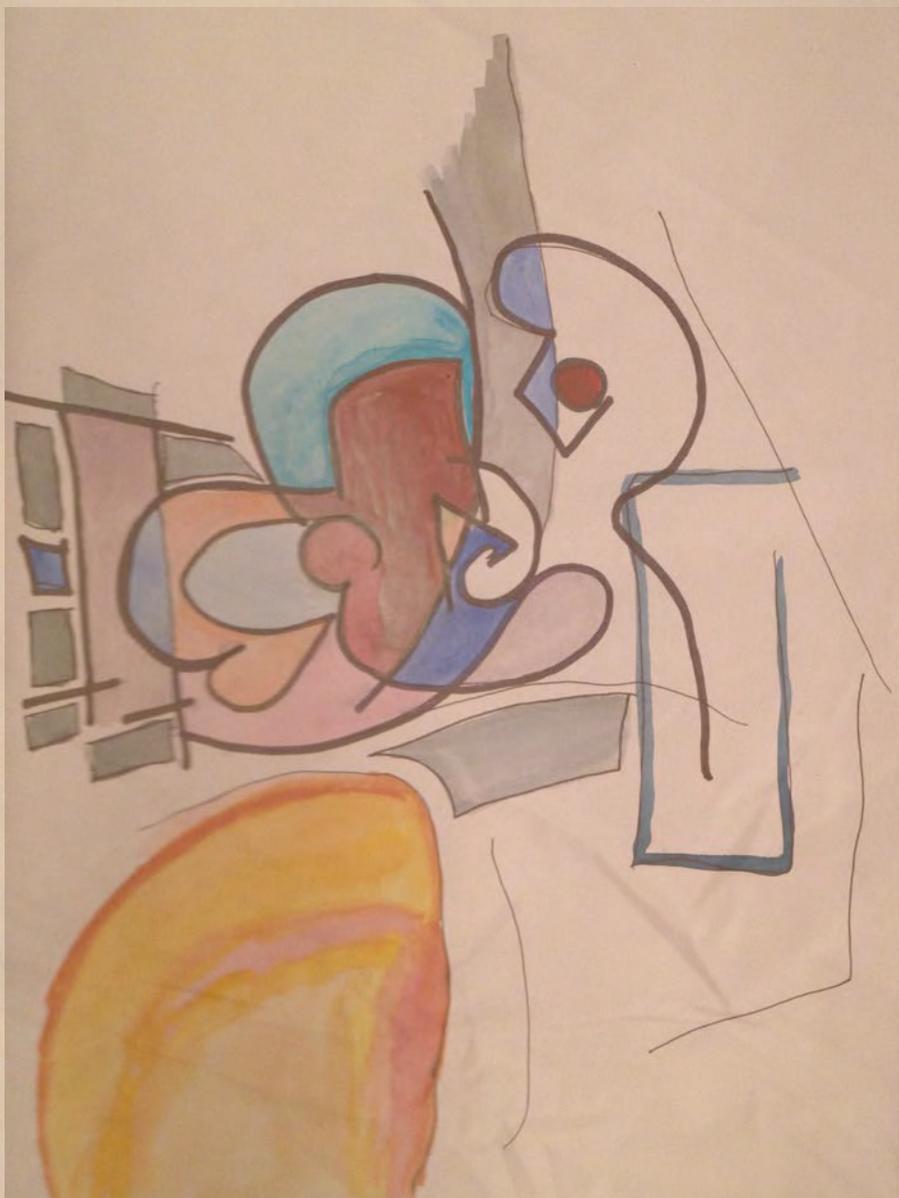
He believes someone is about to poison him
-Maybe it will be me-
I am the person he trusts the most.

Unlocked car doors,
Loose change, a warm jacket,
His to take.

I tell him, unlocked doors are not an open invitation.
No matter,
In his reality,
They are.

Is he broken?
Medication to organize his thoughts.
He won't take any; it might be poison.
He self-medicates.

What can I do?
He sees no problem.
People see a bum, a derelict, a panhandler.
I see a son, a brother,
Lost to me.



watercolour with pen & sharpie | Sarah Carter

Requesting of Others

& Questioning Myself

Quit putting cats in bags then acting like me letting them out is
some kind of sin.

Quit putting cats in bags then acting like me letting them out is
worse than you putting them in.

Quit putting cats in bags; they don't like it.

Make your best effort, and they'll still fight it—oh, they'll still flight it.

With or without me, they'll break free.

With or without me, they long to see.

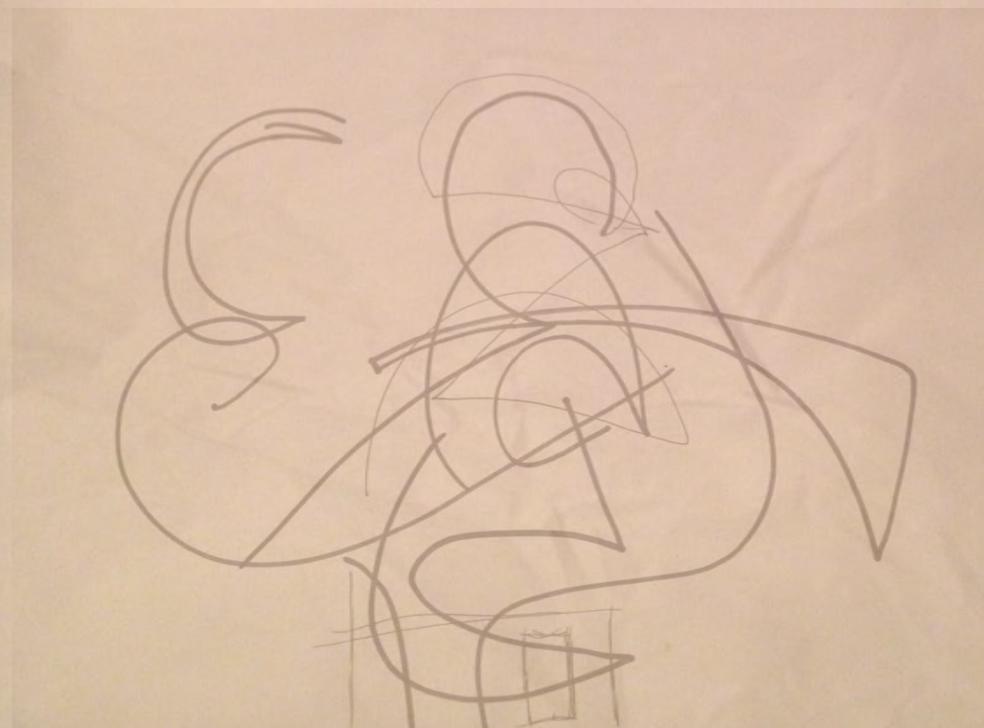
But who doesn't?

Is this revelation?

What else do I already know

if I lose my hesitations?

words | Danielle Romanuk



pen & sharpie | Sarah Carter

Mikah's Inability to Sleep

Mikah's inability to sleep past 7am woke him up. His eyes felt dry, wanting to stay stuck together, closing off the subtle reminders of his procrastination scattered across the bedroom floor. T-shirts he couldn't give away, even though he outgrew them; wrappers of all sorts scattered on the floor; trinkets and toys situated across his dresser.

Mikah acknowledged the state of his bedroom, but questioned if it was easier to push the mess under his bed. Or was it actually easier?

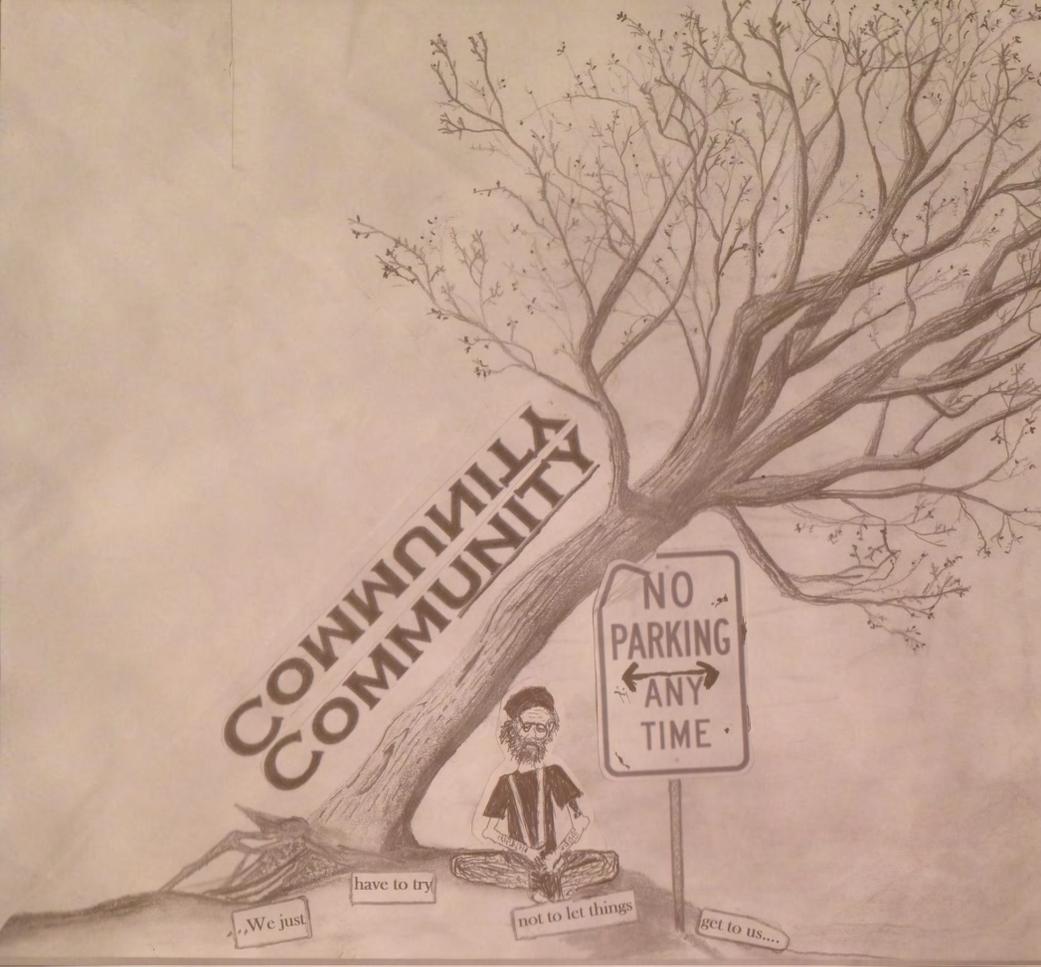
The golden sunlight cut through the bedroom in strips from half-closed blinds. He came home in a stupor from the bar, only locking his door and attempting to close the blinds before sliding into bed.

His feet were on the pillows, and his head was halfway off the mattress. His stiff neck helped him remember the night before.

He wanted a decent amount of sleep, but his mind wanted the whole day to hide away. He thought the whisky would be a melatonin replacement, but instead it woke him up. He felt drawn back and timid. He hadn't made great choices this week; they were now tallying up quickly. He couldn't ignore the tasks he had to do. He couldn't.

Crawling out of bed, grabbing clothing closest to him, Mikah headed to the barn. Early morning dew stippled the grass and flowerbeds in the backyard. The smell of earthworms and wet soil pulled through his nostrils. This scent of the recent rainfall brought him back to the present. He had chores to do in the barn. The smell of the earth was vivid, pulling him out of his head. He was on a better track than last week, when he was staring at the ceiling, surrendering to his bed and staying put. It grew dull very quickly. Mikah picked up his pace and crossed the damp grass. The water came through his fabric shoes, making his toes wet. For some reason, he didn't seem to mind that his feet were wet. He was focused on what he was going to accomplish.

Mikah felt proud he got to the barn. He caught himself grinning, looking around the barn, with fresh hay and tidiness from wall to wall. Of all things, he was most proud that he wasn't going to be staring at his bedroom ceiling for hours.



Grounded Outreach

In life, we grow through adversity. The tree is tilting on one side, almost out rooted, yet begins to blossom.

Under the tree, the garbage man is meditating. He has forgotten the no-parking-any-time sign. We mirror each other.

To me, trees present the essence of life.
Roots: the overlooked birthplace of growth.
I made sure to include them.

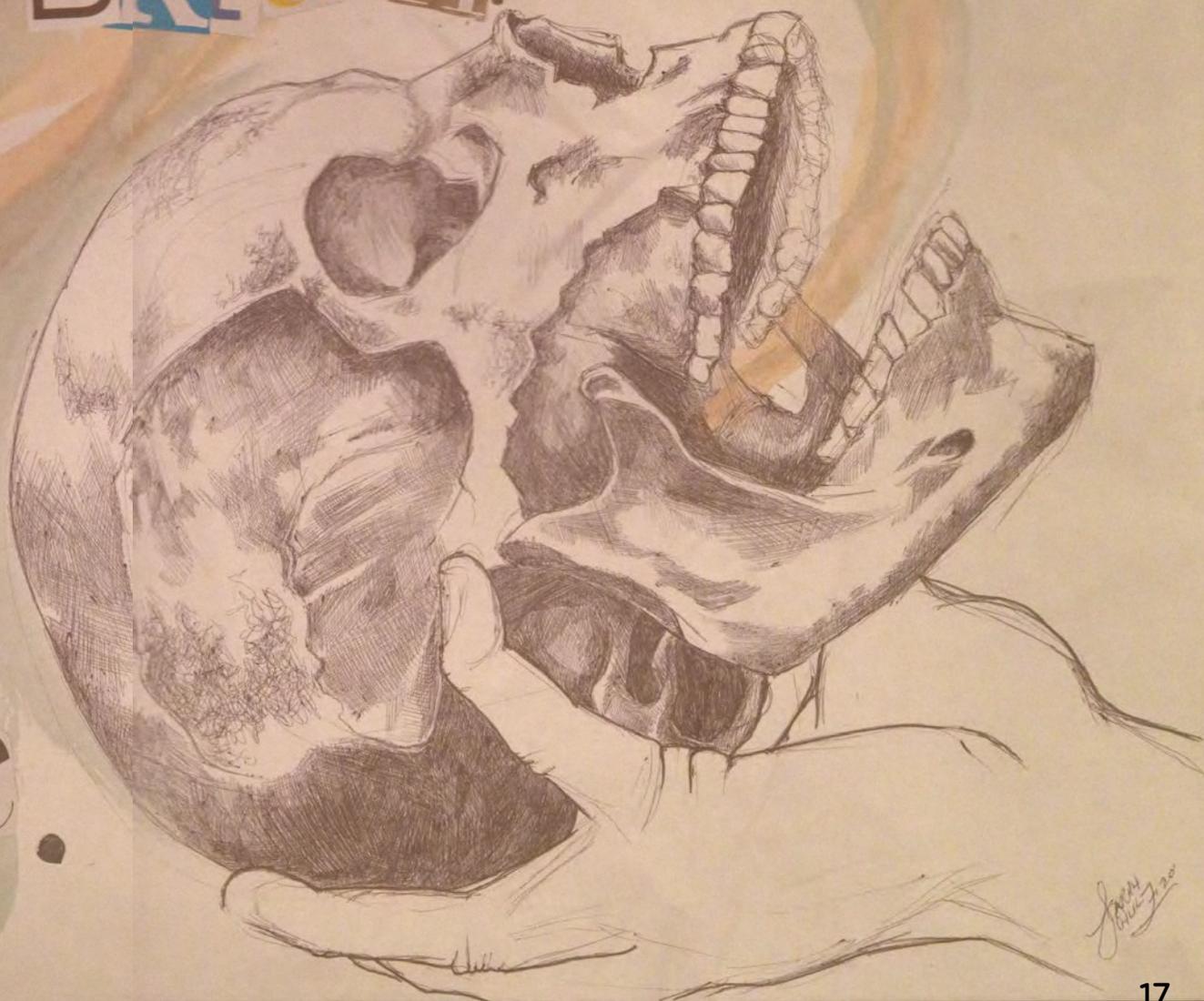
Take this FROM me;

MY last BREATH.

the

FINAL

Release.



Sarah Schulz 2000

Immersed in Music: *Songs from The Willow*

By Danielle Romanuk

I had the honour of experiencing a *Songs from the Willow* class with instructor Joe Lapinski and the Member Artists' band, The Committed Sound Collective. The session begins with general housekeeping, making sure that each musician knows who they'll be working with and what they'll be working on. Joe then leads the band in a meditation where they explore their breath and the thoughts running through their minds. In the calm created, the members gather into groups and begin working on songs. Whether contributing lyrics, a bass line, lead guitar, or percussion, everyone has a place in the Collective's creations.

Bea, a regular participant of *Songs from the Willow*, had her song "I Rise" featured last year at the St Catharines Arts Awards. She collaborated with other *Songs* members Ayaz, Queenz, Mark, and Paul. Bea explained: "It's something I practiced for a lot. I really had to feel like I could nail it on the take I was given ... It was an absolutely incredible opportunity, and I'm so thankful that so many people helped me onto that path to have that chance even while I am still this directionless in life." A common thread among Willow Member Artists is our experience with mental health and/or addictions, and in my personal experience as well as speaking with members from the *Songs* class, I found that the environment created by the Willow Arts Community provides the acceptance and encouragement we all need to thrive.

Bea elaborates on this idea: "I feel like I am actually wanted here. I feel like I can contribute to other people's projects, and they want me in their projects, and [I] feel like I am a necessary cog in something, as if this place wouldn't run the same if I weren't here. The mere fact that it feels like people want me is an absolutely amazing feeling." She goes on to add: "I don't feel like I'm the craziest person in the

room most of the time, and I feel like, even when I am the craziest person in the room, I feel like I'm appreciated." This sense of peer support within the Willow is vital to members, including Jamie, Tammy B, David, and Leah, four other musicians I enjoyed interviewing.



Bea | Tammy B | Jaia

Jamie spoke of "branching out" and how all Willow Member Artists branch out of the same big tree. She also shared her personal traumas and how she hasn't performed in a few decades since "life and responsibility, family life, took over." Now that she is part of the Willow Arts Community, she claims: "I'm back. I'm now writing original music again. I'm now performing again. I'm a unique individual yet [part of a] collective." Tammy B is a newer member who joined in Fall 2019. She describes the experience as her "second chance": the Willow "is so very unique, honest, kind to everybody, and also the community [is here] to help people, no matter if I'm way up high or way down low." At the Willow, Tammy B observes that we are "all of the above."

"*Songs from the Willow* is special for me, as it is a low stress way for

me to be around other people who love music with many different skills, abilities, and interests in music,” David wrote to me. Within the group of artists with barriers, David finds his place, stating that their barriers “[don’t] stop them from being creative” and that *Songs* class allows them to “[take] healthy risks to create without fear of being shamed [or] put down by others.” It’s this kind of supportive atmosphere that David feels “freer to be creative in.” While *Songs from the Willow* has helped David to write and perform some songs, his next goal is “to fix [his] broken 3 string rescue guitar and start learning some basic chords and so on from there.” Whatever your level of musical abilities, there is room to explore and grow at the Willow.

Leah explained to me how the class provides a sense community as well as her bridge to the larger music scene in the Niagara Region. *Songs from the Willow* “has helped me attend more music scenes within the community because I would not go by myself to most of these local events.” She attributes her “branching out” to having “met many interesting individuals and artists along the way [who] continue to persevere” and is confident that “attending art and musical events ... will forever [have] a life changing impact on my education, quality of life, and future messages that will help our younger generations for years to come.” There is a sense throughout the Willow that, while we make improvements in our own lives, we in turn pave the way for future Member Artists by our contribution to the wider arts community.

The overall vibe of this class was work-oriented, with the whole group ready and willing to share their ideas, backup their fellow musicians, and jump into the creative process. Jamie said it best: “Expect the unexpected.” As with many Willow classes, we take a journey into our own potential, we open to creative possibilities, and we find a place to belong. For anyone who has been to a Willow Arts Community showcase, you already know the calibre of talent from the *Songs* class (and beyond), and, for everyone else, you can check out the Willow website at www.thewillowcommunity.com for upcoming event dates. In the words of Tammy B, “stick around” because you might find your new favourite music.

Ready to Rise: Interview with a Psychotherapist

Why psychotherapy?

I’ve always enjoyed observing people. I think my shyness as a kid left me in situations that would lead me to sit, reflect, and be introspective. Along with my shyness comes some sensitivity. While I didn’t appreciate it at the time, my sensitive nature allows me to feel for people and feel with people in a very intentional way. That being said, I didn’t recognize how important it was for me to bring this way of being in the world into the work that I do until I paid attention to how miserable I was when I wasn’t aligning with this day to day as a working professional in a different field. Becoming a therapist was something that I now see was always inside of me. It was a second career choice for me and has become a very sacred path that I have a great deal of passion for. I really do have gratitude for the work I do with each brave individual I work with every day.

What is your primary goal as a therapist?

To provide a space where [people] feel safe, heard, and not alone. Once this is established they are better able to access their inner wisdom to heal.

What do you admire most about your clients?

Their bravery to show up and be vulnerable, knowing that it’s the hardest thing they will ever do.

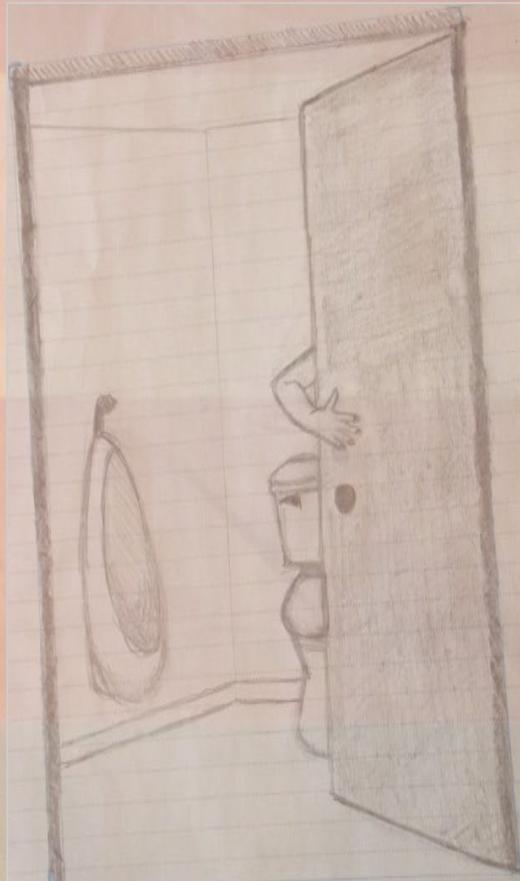
Advice for interacting with people with lived experience:

Be mindful that people are not their mental illness. Someone struggling with depression for example is a person, first and foremost. If we can keep that in mind we will naturally be ourselves and relate to the individual with empathy and authenticity.

Transness at the Psychiatric Hospital

A few years ago, my mental wellness was poor. It was decided that I must go into a treatment facility. In order to be accepted I needed to answer a lot of questions. Why I was on testosterone came up – I thought it was important to disclose that I was a transguy. This fact seemed to become more important to the institution than my current symptoms. I believe I must have been the first openly trans person they had treated. At first, they put off my intake date without any reason. Finally, I was informed that the reason for the delay was that they were waiting for a single room with a washroom to become available. This shocked me as I wasn't supposed to be in a private room. I immediately wanted to know why and was told it was because I was transgender. I asked myself if I should be offended.

Should I question the institution's policies regarding the LGBTQ+ community? Whom were they protecting? As a person in desperate need of psychiatric help I really couldn't unpack or fully explore these questions. I had to choose between getting the help I needed and fighting a system. At this point I was already nervous about going but my looming fear was about transphobia. I still attended and my being trans faded into the background. I never felt that my transness was part of my treatment. I thrived in this mental health facility. As I look back, I realize that the hospital obviously didn't have any protocols in place to serve trans people. I hope things have changed. Isolation is not an answer (even though I loved having my own room).



words | Andrew Rossington pencil | Carolyn Taylor

Scenario

Spun out from repeating the same scenario in my head: a loop that brings on dizziness. Trying to see an invisible friend, itching for a fantasy world to overtake the real me. My fingers make the slithering & bubbling on fingertips that made contact.

There is no self-reflection, only intense focus on the ritual. I must cut the ropes and bind them harder, fibers fraying and red marks appearing on skin. Self-regulate with it, the mindset is insidious.

I am the host, a willing participant. But I am exhausted by the finish. The head spins shimmer, and anxiety boils again, wanting its spot again in my skull. A soft coo, so subtle, comes from the distance. "Come back, look for me when you overwhelm yourself again. I can tie the ropes tighter next time."



Make it Stop | Sarah Schulz

words | Kyle MacDonald

Open Studios

Splattered surface.

This top made of many tables where
we spill our guts and our paint.

A perfect place to start again.

And so again we start.

Replacing trauma with bold
brushstrokes, frustration with a frame.

Creating curves and lines with our bodies.

Designing a pathway forward.

From words of art to words of movement.

Careful! Do not drop them.

These are the fragile words of our days.

We pass them around on our breath:

meds, Rodman, imitation, brain zaps, transgender, washroom blues.

One of us must remove herself quietly.

Elsewhere emerge the images of our nights.

Spiders on sleeping women.

We all bite down on the rope between our teeth now settling into the
sublime silence of group creation.

The stillness covers us like mother's blanket.

The earth has stopped turning.

After three minutes our shared silence is disturbed gently.

Ears awakened by the sounds of sleepy music drifting in.

This fine blue smoke from two rooms away.

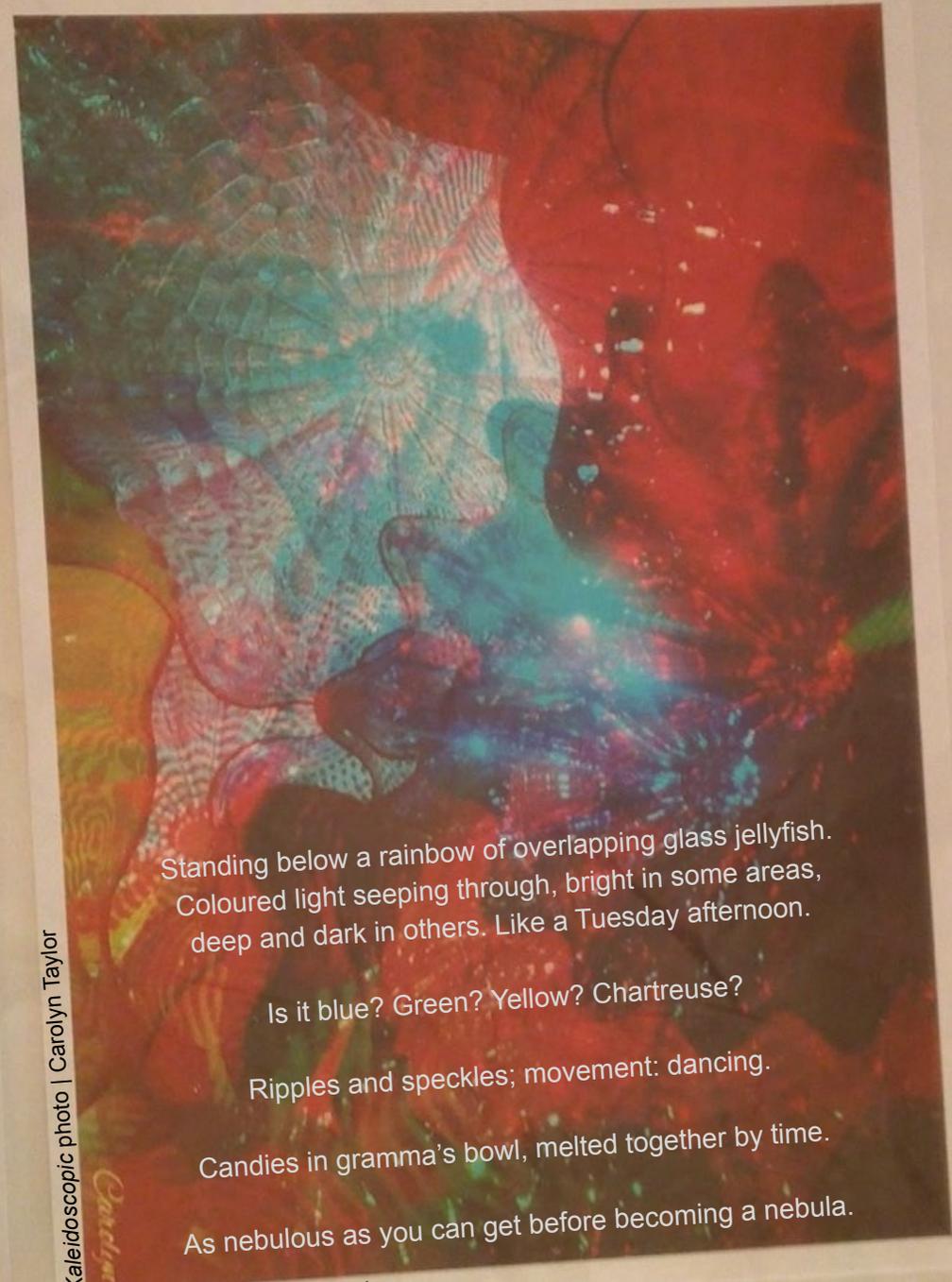
Dancing flute singing drum laughing guitar.

The shades and colors of hope.

Improvising

under a broad willow

in the winter sunlight.



Standing below a rainbow of overlapping glass jellyfish.
Coloured light seeping through, bright in some areas,
deep and dark in others. Like a Tuesday afternoon.

Is it blue? Green? Yellow? Chartreuse?

Ripples and speckles; movement: dancing.

Candies in grandma's bowl, melted together by time.

As nebulous as you can get before becoming a nebula.

Kaleidoscopic photo | Carolyn Taylor

Candies

Jellyfish | Danielle Romanuk

On Two Images:

in response to visual arts content

The horizon caves into the beach
–the beach, a sun–
the shelves of the sky,
orange and grey superimposed.
We wash out of the night,
we are dazzled, in a liquid summer.

Sarah Carter

Sarah playing with neutrals | watercolour | 2020

Concentric lines receding
in a wavy darkness
deployed behind umbrellas of colours.
Blue is electric and eats up the background.
Dots tell us the fabric will not fly away
from where it hangs.

Carolyn Taylor

Luminosity | photograph | 2020

Life doesn't come with

“Trigger Warnings!”

By Carolyn Taylor BSW RSW & Willow Member Artist

Let's be honest: Everyone seems to throw around the term “triggered” these days but what does it really mean? Initially triggered was a term assigned to episodes of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) when either internal or external factors caused someone to re-experience their trauma, i.e. flashbacks. Now it is also used to refer to strong emotional reactions that can be associated with a variety of mental health concerns such as anxiety, eating disorders or substance abuse. Triggers are problematic when they cause someone to relapse into harmful coping strategies.

So, since life doesn't come with “Trigger Warnings,” and at some point you may find yourself triggered, you need to learn healthy coping skills. Help comes in many forms, and it is not weakness to seek support and guidance to improve your life. If you're not sure whom to ask for help, call 211 (within Ontario) and they can assist you to find resources in your community.

Unfortunately, while there are crisis services, ongoing support may not be immediately available. The good news is that you don't have to be idle while you wait. You can begin by asking yourself what triggers you are aware of. It may be a good idea to make a list. Once you have identified some of the internal and/or external triggers, you can then list what harmful coping skills you or others have observed you using.

If you've managed those two suggestions, it may also benefit you to list some of the consequences of those unhealthy coping strategies. Being able to identify what is working and what isn't will help you to develop a plan to learn healthy coping skills. You can come up with some initial ideas about how to cope such as joining an art class, getting a gym membership or listening to music.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Practice relaxation techniques, self-soothing and/or deep breathing.
- Anticipate and plan a coping strategy for triggers.
- Call someone if you're feeling triggered.
- Keep a journal.
- Practice mindfulness (there are great apps available such as Mindfulness Coach).
- Read self-help books to add new coping strategies.

Bottom line, be patient with yourself. Learning new skills and dropping old ones can be hard; however, practicing new skills when you aren't triggered will help you to use them when you really need them. As you build your skills, you will find it easier to cope with triggering events because you will be able to stop, think, and choose how you want to respond. Life doesn't come with trigger warnings so we have to develop our ability to be resilient and equip ourselves to handle life's challenges.

You got this!

Life doesn't come with "Trigger Warnings!"

Epic

Be bold!

Be brave!

Be honest!

Embrace yourself!

Stay kind,

caring,

and generous,

Embrace yourself!

Be funny,

be inspirational,

be adventurous,

Embrace yourself!

Stay involved,

constructive,

and exuberant,

Embrace yourself!

Be forgiving,

be thoughtful,

be understanding,

Embrace yourself!

Be confident,

be resilient,

be epic!

Be yourself!

How We Define: A Gloss Over of Terms

Anxiety

- The feeling of being pressed for resources.

Art

- See page 6.

Barriers to Care

- Bank balance, accessible transportation, stigma.

Brain Zaps

- Electrical transmissions to let you know coming off meds can suck.

Common Sense

- The uncommon quality of problem solving without a prompt or reward.

Community

- A social safety net, lesser known as outreach.

Depression

- Emotionally depleted.

Forgiveness

- The relief of a burden.

Gaps in Care

- Lost progress.

Insanity

- See page 9.

Life Skills

- What other people take for granted.

Mania

- Being the most productive you've ever been & simultaneously becoming unhinged.

Mental Health / Mental Illness

- See page 6.

Neuroplasticity

- Brain changer.

Patience

- Waiting months for diagnosis & years to get through treatment.

Procrastination

- I'll tell you later.

Psychotherapy

- Just talk it out.

Radical Acceptance

- Saying yes to change & following through.

Rapid Cycling

- It's ok; ok maybe it's not; but it might be; either way it's pissing me off; now I'm sad.

Restlessness

- I'm too tired to do anything & too jacked to sit still.

Rodman Hall

- See page 5.

Somatic Symptom

- Feeling the physical pain of your emotions.

Skills Breakdown

- Nothing works!

Sarcasm

- The truth in a funhouse mirror.

Triggered/Trigger Warning

- See pages 27-28.

Willow Arts Community

- Where the recovering creative types belong.

Window of Tolerance

- Your view of reality & ability to cope.

Free Mental Health & Addiction Support Services in Niagara Region

COAST Niagara -1-866-550 5205

COAST Niagara provides mobile crisis outreach and intervention service offering immediate telephone counseling and if necessary, on-site outreach intervention in the home or on community locations. 24/7

Distress Centre – 905 688-3711

Distress Centre provides support to individuals in distress or crisis and education to the Niagara community which assists people to take ownership of personal choices and manage their lives in a healthy manner. 24/7

www.distresscentreniagara.com

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Niagara – 905 641 5222

Urgent support and walk-in Counseling

Mental health counsellors provide same day service to individuals by exploring their immediate concerns and offering assistance with crisis management and problem solving. No appointment required:
St. Catharines-Tuesdays 11:30-5:30 PM, Branscombe Mental Health Centre, 1338 Fourth Ave.
Niagara Falls-Wed. 11:30-5:30 PM, CMHA Niagara Falls Resource Centre, 6760 Morrison St.
Fort Erie-Thursdays 11:30-5:30PM, CMHA Fort Erie Office, 20 Jarvis St.

www.cmhaniagara.ca

CASON- COMMUNITY ADDICTION SERVICES OF NIAGARA – 905-684-1183

CASON provides comprehensive alcohol, drug, and gambling, addiction treatment for individuals and their families.

www.casson.ca

Niagara Sexual Assault Centre (CARSA) 905 682-5258

CARSA provides services in a safe and comfortable environment for survivors of child sexual abuse, incest, and child sexual assault. They offer a 24-hour crisis line, emergency services, individual and group counseling, accompaniment and advocacy through medical and legal proceedings, public education and community events.

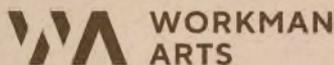
www.sexualassault.niagara.org

Note: some of these service may be affected by COVID-19 restrictions.
For more information on these and other services,
visit Niagara Community Information Database: www.niagara.cioc.ca or dial 211.



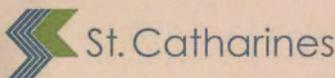
WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY

Willow Arts Community is a non-profit organization dedicated to removing barriers for artists living with mental health illness/substance use to access creative spaces to make & exhibit work, exchange & advance skills, & expand professional networks.



We use arts as an agent of social change by connecting & engaging the public with exhibitions, publications, and performances to lessen the effects of stigma and isolation.

Generously supported by the St. Catharines Cultural Investment Program (SCCIP)

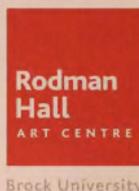


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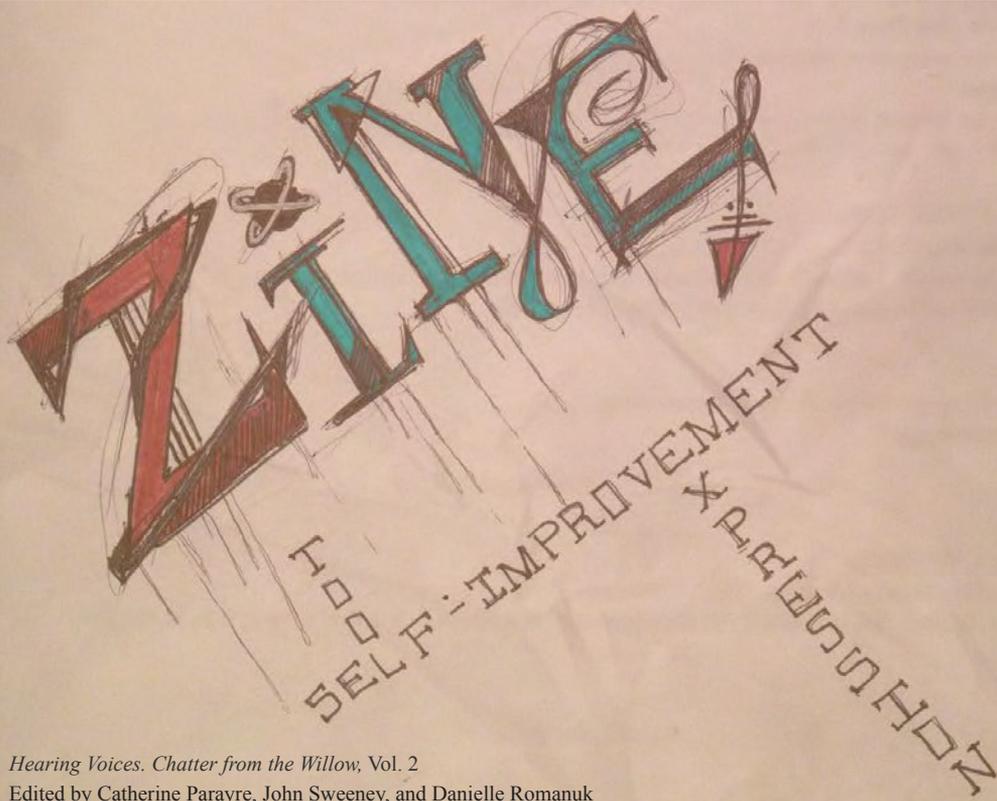
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Little Zine Doodle | Sarah Schulz

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