



Annual Report

2022



WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY

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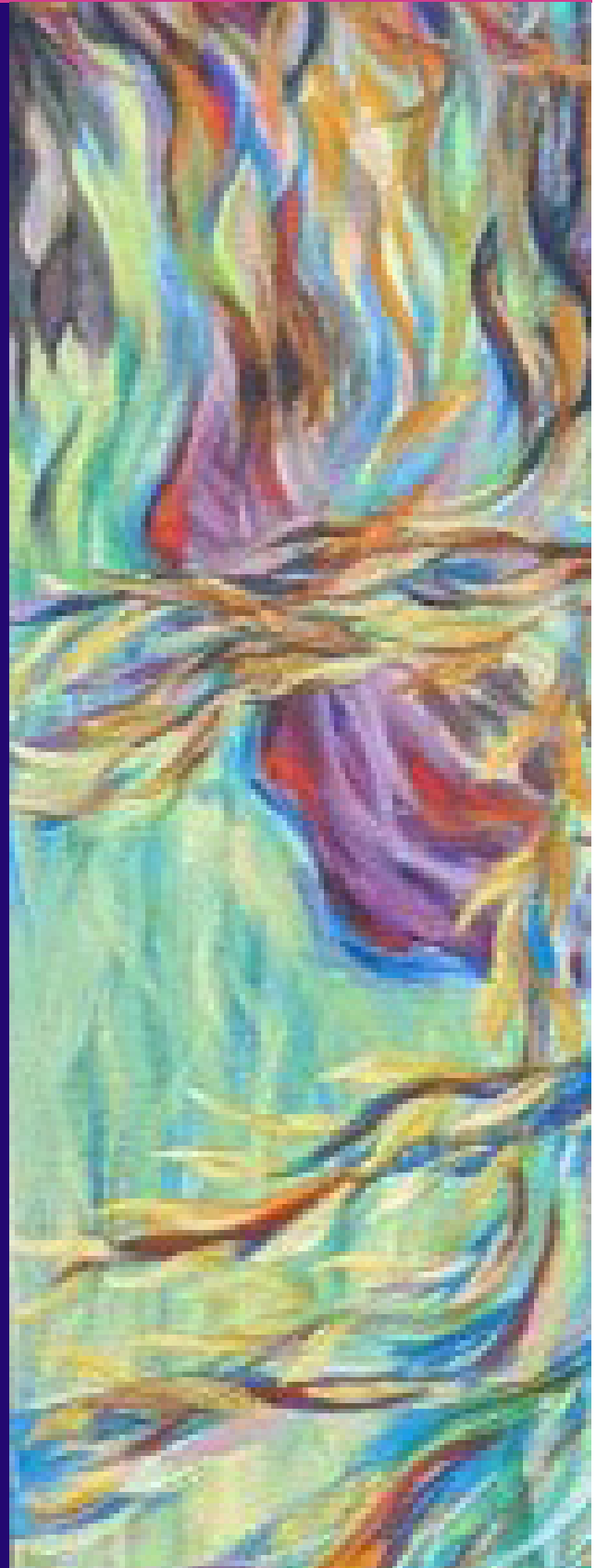
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MISSION, VISION, VALUES



MISSION

Willow Arts Community is an arts + peer support organization dedicated to reducing barriers and providing opportunities for artists and creatives with lived experience of mental illness/substance use in Niagara.

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

VISION

An inclusive community where all levels of artistic expression are celebrated.

WE ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- Presenting a variety of artistic opportunities in visual, performance, and literary disciplines.
- Providing opportunities to integrate with professionals in the Niagara arts community.
- Promoting a greater public understanding and reducing stigma of mental illness and substance use through the creation, presentation and discussion of artistic media.
- Encouraging exploration of vocational or creative employment in the arts.

VALUES

- Treat all members as artists.
- Recognize that members are at different stages of their practice including a variety of interests, skills, and talents.
- Encourage members to set goals, boundaries, and be independent.
- Hold members accountable and also understands their specific needs and circumstances.
- Celebrate members' achievements big or small.
- Foster an inclusive, brave, and supportive environment.
- Remain responsive, accountable, and flexible to the needs of our community.

Board President Remarks

2022 proved to be a year of both **growth and change** for The Willow. Having emerged from the isolation, uncertainty and Zoom-dominated world of the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear that the need for a **safe, inclusive and peer-driven** arts community has never been more apparent. For many **creatives and artists** who call Niagara home, The Willow became that space.

As The Willow continues to grow, so too do our Board policies. This year saw us expand our governance structures, allowing us to welcome our first full time staff member. And this is just the beginning. Working with **Armstrong Strategy Group**, we continue to look to the **future** as we develop a **plan** that will see Willow Arts **thrive** in the years to come.

This year, we exemplified The Willow employing the **arts for social change** through our large **outdoor mural** at Silver Spire. This brought together **social services agencies** and recovery groups, our friends at **Carousel Players**, the **Silver Spire congregation**, our members, and **new friends** who stopped by to chat and add to this large scale patchwork quilt mural.

Building on our **commitment** to a safe space for all, The Willow continues to join forces with OUTniagara, OPIRG Brock and Silver Spire - **partnerships** that help Willow reflect the **diverse membership** we serve.

All of this was made possible by the continued support of our funders and donors. The **City of St. Catharines** increased its support for Willow - a direct result of the **unique and important**

role The Willow plays in our city and region.

Along with grants, we also saw growth in our donors and sponsors. From **PenFinancial** to **Accenture** as well as two benefit events by local rock and roller **Rob Burke** and seasoned thespian **John Sweeney**, the **generosity** of those who support The Willow ensures we can continue to offer **diverse arts programming** right here in Niagara.

Last year Willow Arts was **recognized and nominated** for three awards. Two for the City of St. Catharines Arts Awards **in Making a Difference** and **in Arts in Education**, and for a Niagara U.N.I.T.Y Award with **Pride Niagara**.

With so much happening at The Willow, I can't help but thank all of our **members**. There wouldn't be a Willow without you! I would also like to thank our out-going Board member Michelle Nicolls who helped helm the Board through a pandemic and so much **growth**.

Finally, on behalf of the Board, I offer a heartfelt **thank you** to The Willow's tireless Founder and Director, Shauna MacLeod. As Director, Shauna is always working to **improve programming**, building **new partnerships** and above all, being there for our **members**. Thank you.

As we head into another exciting year of art, friendships and new opportunities, I invite you all to join us - we're **just getting started!**

Sincerely,

Patrick Crummey (he/him)
President & Chair

Founder/Director Remarks

I have the distinct **privilege** of knowing and holding our members' **stories and perspectives** that are shared every day at Willow Arts. I have witnessed **creative transformations, personal victories**, and an abundance of excellent **new work**. I am grateful to know and work with each and every **member** who walked through our door this past year.

Last year began with a Covid-19 lockdown where we found ourselves Zooming together again. I was fortunate to spend excellent time supporting local **queer and trans** artists to develop new work in response to **OUTniagara's** large scale research project.

Last year we piloted "**Skill Shares**", a project that for many acted as a springboard for **personal and artistic growth**. It helped members develop goal setting, **confidence**, artistic **leadership**, planning, and arts facilitation.

Our spring season was busy with **arts education programs**. We offered weekly **courses** in collage, songwriting, and improv. We hosted **workshops** on zines and abstract movement, and provided three drop-in **open studios** a week. The season ended with a large outdoor **mural** that now greets the many visitors of **Silver Spire**.

Our summer was spent celebrating in the community. Our performers improvised at **Mahtay Cafe** with **Improv Niagara**, our visual artists discussed new work at the **5 x 2**, and our musician's performed their originals songs at **In the Soil Arts Festival** and **OPIRG Brock's** summer market **downtown St. Catharines**.

Last summer we designed a project for the **Niagara Falls Family Pride** event, and proudly showcased "Chosen Family" a community art project that lived at the **Niagara Falls Community Health Care Centre** for the remainder of the year.

We also helped to plan and co-host various **social justice** forums to include the arts. I was honoured to help support Silver Spire's **Harm Reduction Forum** and the annual **International Overdose Awareness Day** event with local activist and health agencies.

In the fall, we ran weekly **arts education courses** in sculptural mask-making, songwriting, radio production and sound development, and watercolour. We hosted 2 **drop-in studios** a week, and facilitated a studio **project** that helped to **transform** our studio.

We **celebrated** our fall season with our 6th edition of our **collaborative zine** "Hearing Voices" called **Our Personal Protest** that **published** 20 members and hosted an **arts showcase** with friends and families at Silver Spire.

What a year! All of this is made possible from the immense **support** Willow Arts received from our program **partners**, my professional **mentors**, our **volunteers**, our dedicated and amazing **board of directors**, our **funders, donors and sponsors**, our **friends and fans** in the community, and of course our **members!**

I'm so excited to share what's in store for 2023. With **love** and **hope**,

Shauna MacLeod (she/they)

Membership Snapshot

WHO ARE WILLOW ARTS MEMBERS?

Willow Arts members are individuals who are motivated to explore their **creatives identities**, artists that already have a dedicated **arts practice**, and creatives looking to **connect and learn** alongside peers.

Spending time in our studio, it becomes clear how beautiful and unique a place like Willow Arts is. Every day we see **artistic collaboration** between people who would have never met outside of these spaces, **friendships** that have grown over the years, and we see people honouring their **unique perspectives** through their creative work.

100% of our membership have lived experience of **mental illness/substance use**. Our staff and the majority of the artists we hire also have **lived experience**. We are proud to create **low-barrier spaces** that our members feel **safe** to return to, and spaces where members feel **encouraged and supported** to explore their artistic and creative identities.

QUICK FACTS

AS OF MAY 5, 2023

- Willow Arts has 150 registered members
- 47% identify as part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+community
- 51% indicate visual arts as their primary artistic discipline
- 52% live on a fixed income like ODSP or Ontario Works
- 48% are aged 41-64
- 73% reside in St. Catharines
- 50% have over 5 years of artistic experience (Institution, Community Classes and/or Self Taught)

“It helps me to have opportunities to express myself creatively and develop my artistic skills. I have made valuable connections and friendships there.”



Memberships and all activities and opportunities are provided free of charge. We hire local artists and arts workers to teach programming, and hire our members to lead projects. Our programming runs seasonally, with new opportunities always being presented. Willow Arts members can:

- Express interest in registered courses and workshops
- Attend drop-in studio times
- Participate in special projects and at community events
- Gain access to basic art supplies, equipment, and our resource library
- Present work in group showcases, exhibitions, performances, and in publications
- Provide feedback to improve our organization
- Volunteer with day-to-day studio management
- Apply to lead projects and teach programming

Partnership Profiles



Silver Spire

Silver Spire is home to Willow Arts Community, Carousel Players (theatre organization for youth) as well as various recovery programs. Silver Spire hosts a shower and laundry program for folks living close to the streets and from time to time serves as a drop-in shelter. It is a dynamic and busy building where the arts and social justice meet.

Willow Arts is proud to support Silver Spire's strategic pillars and is excited to strengthen our partnership and work together to support our community.

OPIRG Brock

Willow Arts is an Action Group of OPIRG Brock, WHAT THIS MEANS IN ACTION :

- Ongoing support from the OPIRG Brock team around organizational planning, grant proposals, partnerships, & outreach
- Semi-regular partnerships on grant proposals and Willow courses
- Semi-regular booking of the Willow Arts Studio by the OPIRG Brock team for community meetings & crafting events
- Agreeing to the OPIRG Brock Safer Space Policy & OPIRG Brock Action Group Policies
- In the year ahead, access to a monthly fundraising platform through the OPIRG Brock Patreon

OUTniagara

OUTniagara supports our local 2SLGBTQ+ community and beyond by amplifying the voices of our community, acting as a public policy advocate and helping to build relationships within the community.

Willow Arts has been working with OUTniagara since 2021 to support their Community Strength and Needs Assessment, provide studio space for workshops, and Willow Arts staff serves on various committees.

In 2023, we are launching exciting program opportunities to support the 2SLGBTQ+ community that directly responds to their research and will support our many sexual and gender diverse Willow Arts members.

We provided over

285

hours of free arts programming

And saw over

2500

active participation in our programming and events

We raised

\$26,120

in donations and sponsorships

and paid

\$30,000

in artist fees and honoraria to local artists and Willow Arts Members

Which allowed us to hire

45

local artists and arts workers, majority with lived experience

Making a Difference

Willow Arts responds to a real and growing need in Niagara. People deserve access to safe and accessible spaces that meet people where they are at, and that are intentionally designed to welcome people in.

Our programming is adapted from a proven Workman Arts model with over 30-years of best practices, and has shown to reduce social isolation for people living with mental illness/substance use.

Willow members have also indicated these benefits of joining:

- Increased sense of value and belonging to a community
- Feelings of motivation, creativity, and inspiration
- Increased social interaction and development of communication skills, accountability, and goal setting
- Access to arts courses and creative outlets gives members a sense of hope and a sense of purpose
- Relationships with family and friends have improved as a result of creative activities
- Increased skills related to art practices and a higher level of output
- Larger professional and social network
- Improved employability skills
- Meaningful activities resulting in fewer negative mental health symptoms

Every day we celebrate the value of lived experience and peer support and exemplify “nothing for us without us”. We regularly celebrate new and original work created by our membership through seasonal showcases and community events such as live music, visual arts exhibitions, poetry readings, festival appearances, and zines publications. This helps us to reduce stigma by inviting the wider community into the conversation.

Thank you for an excellent year!



We couldn't do it without our donors, sponsors, and partners.

We thank our generous donors from last year: Carlos Robayo, Kelle Neufeld, Jessica Potts, Charles and Philomena Crummey, Allison Chambers, Natalie Fedj, Bianca Neufeld, Kim Elltoft, Patrick Joseph Crummey, Sandy Middleton, Beverly Chavers, Sarah Lesniewski, Sirignano Contracting, John Sweeney, and Celeste Turner.

Together, we made a real difference in the lives of the people we serve. Your support helps us fulfill our mission to reduce barriers and provide opportunities for artists and creatives with lived experience of mental illness/substance use in Niagara. Thank you.

PROGRAM PARTNERS



FUNDERS

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



DONORS & SPONSORS



We thank you for your continued support in our programs.

Willow Arts Community

366 St. Paul St.

St. Catharines, ON L2R 3N2

www.thewillowcommunity.com

thewillowcommunity@gmail.com

The Willow Community Support Services is a Registered Charity

Charity Registration Number: 760231696RR0001