



**WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY**
Create • Connect • Celebrate

MEMBER HANDBOOK VOL.2 | 2026

**ARTWORK BY: ANDREA EBY
PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL SCHMIDT**

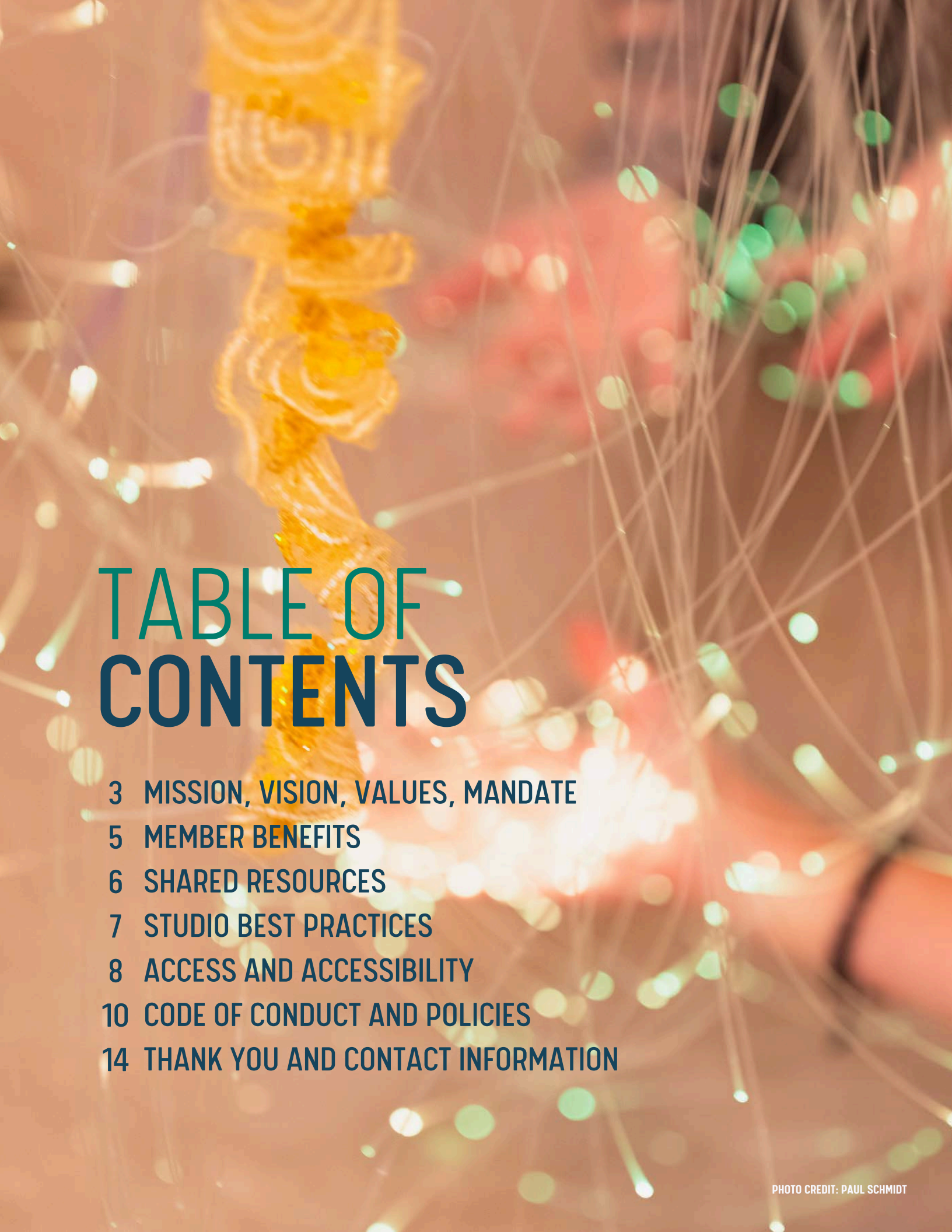


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 MISSION, VISION, VALUES, MANDATE
- 5 MEMBER BENEFITS
- 6 SHARED RESOURCES
- 7 STUDIO BEST PRACTICES
- 8 ACCESS AND ACCESSIBILITY
- 10 CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES
- 14 THANK YOU AND CONTACT INFORMATION



MISSION

Willow Arts Community provides low-barrier peer-to-peer arts education, and fosters safe spaces for creative exploration and connections for people with living experience of mental illness or substance use in Niagara.

VISION

A society free of stigma, void of shame, where artistic expression is supported and knows no bounds.

WE ACHIEVE THIS BY:

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



UNSCENE OPENING RECEPTION 2025
PHOTO CREDIT: LAUREN GARBUTT

VALUES

- **Respect** - Treat all members as artists
- **Honour** - Recognize that members are at different stages of their practice
- **Accountability** - Encourage members to set goals, boundaries, and be independent
- **Compassion** - Meet people where they are at
- **Celebrate** - Recognize members' achievements
- **Safety** - Foster an inclusive and supportive environment
- **Responsive** - Flexible to the needs of our community

MANDATE

Being peer-led, informed by research, rooted in best practices, and committed to remaining free of charge makes us leaders in this cross-sector initiative. Willow Arts is the first registered charity of its kind in Niagara with the mandate to advance education by providing structured learning activities such as courses, instructional seminars and workshops in music, theatre or performing arts, visual arts, literature, dance, media arts, and craft for adults living with mental illness or substance use. We successfully reduce social isolation and increase wellbeing through active participation in our accessible and enriching programming.



MEMBER BENEFITS

Membership grants access to artistic programs and creative opportunities and is free for artists and creatives (18+) with lived or living experience of mental illness/substance use in Niagara. Programs and opportunities change each season. Opportunities are shared via email, newsletter, social media, and on our website.

AS A WILLOW MEMBER, YOU CAN:

- Express interest in registering for arts education courses and workshops
- Attend any drop-in Open Studio, courses, and workshops available to all members
- Participate in special projects with community partners
- Access art supplies and equipment (restrictions may apply)
- Access our arts resource library
- Present work in group performances, exhibitions, and publications
- Provide feedback to improve our organization
- Volunteer to assist with day-to-day studio management and community events
- Apply to lead projects and teach courses and workshops

SHARED RESOURCES



WILLOW ARTS HAS

A 987 SQUARE FOOT ARTS EDUCATION STUDIO,
AND LARGE SHARED ADMINISTRATIVE WORKSPACE WITH A RESOURCE LIBRARY



WILLOW ARTS SHARES

GYMNASIUMS, THE SANCTUARY, AND
SMALLER MEETING SPACES WITH
GROUPS WITHIN SILVER SPIRE



EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

WE PROVIDE A WIDE-VARIETY OF VISUAL ARTS
MATERIALS, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, EASELS,
TEXTILES, TEACHING AIDS, LAPTOP, WIFI,
PROGRAM SPECIFIC STORAGE SPACE AND MORE

All supplies are provided for courses and workshops. Members are welcome to bring their own materials, supplies, and equipment to the Open Studios.

As this is a dynamic and shared studio space, in progress artworks may be stored in the studio (space permitting) but all projects must be removed by the end of each season.

Projects not supported in our studio include: oil paint, spray paint, encaustic, any items involving extreme heat, flame, caustic chemicals, or smells.

STUDIO BEST PRACTICES



Here are some studio best practices, developed by members of The Willow community to support a space for making art, taking creative risks, and caring for ourselves and all members of our community.

- Art can challenge, delight, inspire, and confront.
 - It's okay to "get messy" - please clean up after yourself literally and figuratively.
- This space is meant for exploration, play, and experimentation.
 - Make "bad art", try things out, change your mind and start again.
 - All skill levels are welcome here.
- Be kind and respectful.
 - Only give feedback when it's asked for, let others have their own experience.
- Take only what you can use in the moment.
 - This includes art supplies, energy, space, time.
- We all bring lived experiences to this space, so tell your own story.
 - Seek consent before repeating any personal stories shared by other members and instructors. This includes taking photos or sharing photos of others work.
- Access looks different for each person. Respect that not all artforms, spaces, and opportunities are available to everyone in the same way - and that's okay!
- Arrive as you are and set boundaries that are right for you.
 - Take care of yourself, share your pronouns, take a break when you need it.
 - Ask for what you need and feel free to say, "No, Thank you."
- This is a brave space for creative risk-taking and self-expression.
 - Value effort as much as outcome, and honour the courage it takes to show up.
- Do your best to come on your bad days. Making art feels good.

Willow Arts is not art therapy. We are an arts community, and our programs are led by artists, not therapists. At the same time, we recognize that making art, expressing ourselves, learning new skills, and connecting with others can support wellbeing and healing. We encourage everyone to take care of their own health and emotional safety, ask for what they need, and access additional support when needed.



ACCESS & ACCESSIBILITY

MUSIC GATHERING 2025

LOCATION

Willow Arts Community (The Willow) is located downtown St. Catharines, Ontario within Silver Spire United Church at **366 St. Paul Street**. Our studio and office are on the shared traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Neutral Peoples and many other Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We offer our sincere gratitude and respect to the original and continued stewards of this land. We also acknowledge Indigenous, Black, People of Colour and 2SLGBTQQAI+ people that have been marginalized for centuries and more - and our collective responsibility to take action for a better world free from oppression, discrimination, and racism.

ATTENDING STUDIO PROGRAMS

We kindly ask that members arrive on time, and no more than 10 mins early, for programs. We require members to leave the studio and exit the facility within 15 minutes of the end of activities so that we can prepare for our next program.

Members are required to notify staff of any absences or late arrivals to programs they are registered in (by email or text), and to email staff if you can no longer participate in a registered course or workshop. This does not apply to any drop in programs.

Oftentimes, members are nervous to attend the first time due to symptoms of their mental health. Staff are available at the start of each program to welcome you into the building and help you feel more comfortable being in a new space with new people. Call or text our cellphone at 905-328-9277 if you need assistance.



ENTERING THE BUILDING

The doors of the facility are often locked by mid-afternoon. **Text or call 905-328-9277 upon arrival** or if you need assistance getting into the building.

PARKING AND TRANSIT

There is a small, free parking lot at the corner of Bond Street and Head Street and paid parking on the streets. The St. Catharines Bus Terminal is 400 metres away.

Detailed driving, parking, and transit information is available on our website at thewillowcommunity.com/contact

ACCESSIBILITY

There are ramps to enter the building from the St. Paul Street and Head Street entrances, and a lift to access all floors. There are two accessible washroom in the building, as well as a few genderless washrooms. Willow members do not have to be sober to participate, and we follow our Code of Conduct to make decisions based on behaviour and safety.

ABOUT SILVER SPIRE UNITED CHURCH:

Silver Spire affirms diversity by including and celebrating people of every age, race, belief, culture, ability, income level, family configuration, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. It is their desire to be a welcoming and affirming sacred space for all. Silver Spire is home to Willow Arts Community, Carousel Players (theatre organization for youth) as well as various recovery programs and Indigenous community groups. Silver Spire hosts shower, dinner, and laundry programs for folks living close to the streets. It is a dynamic and busy building where the arts and social justice meet.



A photograph of two women performing on stage. The woman on the left has long, dark, curly hair and is wearing a dark top. She is holding a microphone and has her right arm raised. The woman on the right is wearing a light-colored baseball cap, a denim jacket over a pink shirt, and has a flower pinned to her jacket. She is also holding a microphone. The background is dark with stage lighting.

CODE OF CONDUCT

QUEENZ WON AND JANE PERFORMING 'I RISE' ORIGINAL SONG
THE FIRST ONTARIO PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE 2019

Willow Arts Community (The Willow) is a shared experience for everyone to enjoy.

Members, instructors, volunteers, and staff are expected to treat one another with respect, fairness, dignity, and professionalism.

Willow members respect each other as artists and as individuals. The Willow is committed to providing a space that is psychologically and physically safe. In addition to following all guidelines set out by The Willow, members, instructors, volunteers, and staff are asked to go beyond what is required by law and behave in a way that helps to create a place where people feel comfortable and safe.

By participating in our programs and entering our spaces, it is understood that you will abide by these policies. This policy extends to the Willow's digital spaces and forms of communication, including but not limited to social media, texts, phone calls, and emails to staff. Unwillingness to follow the Code of Conduct may result in suspension or termination of membership.



DIGITAL COLLAGE OF WILLOW MEMBERS CREATED BY AMBER LEE WILLIAMS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICY:

In keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Code, The Willow prohibits discrimination or harassment and protects the right to be free from hate activity based on age, ancestry, citizenship, creed (religion), colour, disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender identity, level of literacy, marital status, place of origin, membership in a union or staff association, political affiliation, race, receipt of public assistance, record of offences, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristic by or within the organization.

ANTI-VIOLENCE POLICY:

The following activities will not be tolerated and will result in an immediate minimum 3-month suspension of membership.

- harassment
- sexual harassment
- physical violence
- loud, continued verbal abuse of participants, staff, instructors, volunteers, or members of the public which is deemed to be aggressive, intimidating, or having the objective of inciting violence
- damaging another artist's work
- physical vandalism to the building or equipment
- refusal to exit the building in accordance with the rules as a means of disrupting activity or continuing to intimidate staff, instructors or participants
- any overt activity aimed at intimidating, and which can be seen as promoting or escalating potential situation

Further measures to protect the safety of the Willow community will be taken if required, and the police will only be called as last resort.

CONFLICTS EXTERNAL TO WILLOW ARTS COMMUNITY:

Willow members may encounter one another outside of Willow Arts Community, in external arts projects or in the community at large, and it is possible for conflicts to arise in these situations. The Willow cannot become involved in resolving issues between members that take place outside of Willow spaces and programs. Members are expected to respect the role of the organization and treat other Willow members professionally and with respect.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY & STRATEGIES:

‘Conflict Resolution’ refers to Willow’s process for addressing interpersonal conflicts, as well as individual incidents, that occur between Willow members, staff, instructors, volunteers or anyone else attending The Willow programs or activities. Resolving issues productively is important to us at The Willow and depending on the nature of the incident, the following protocol will be used to assist in finding solutions.

If there is an incident where a member, instructor, volunteer, or staff person violates the Code of Conduct, Anti-Discrimination Policy, and/or Anti-Violence Policy, these are the steps that will be taken:

FIRST INCIDENT

Informal conversation with Willow representatives to address the issue as soon as it arises.

SECOND INCIDENT

Formal conversation to address the issue with Willow representatives, including an explanation and documentation of issue.

THIRD INCIDENT

Willow representatives will communicate conditions of continued participation and establish a period of probation, withdrawal from program[s], and/or withdrawal from membership.

VIOLENT INCIDENT

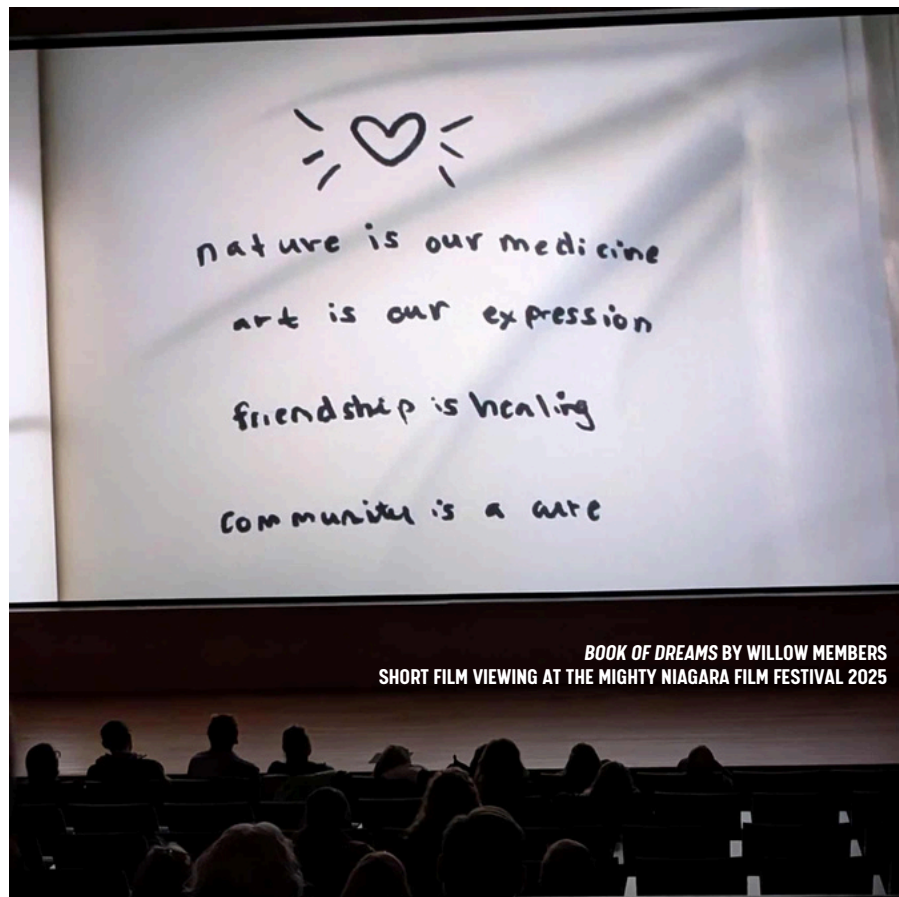
An immediate minimum 3-month suspension of membership and possibly the permanent termination of membership.

REPORTING INCIDENTS:

Should an instructor, member, or volunteer witness or experience anything in violation of this Code of Conduct, please report it verbally or in writing to an appropriate Willow representative as soon as possible. Willow representatives are the staff (Director, Program Coordinator) and the Board of Directors.

For incidents involving members, instructors, and volunteers, please report directly to a Willow staff member. Should an instructor, member, or volunteer experience a violation of these policies by a Willow staff member, please report it directly with the Board of Directors at thewillowboard@gmail.com. All reports will be completely confidential and anonymous.

Together, Willow staff, members, instructors, and volunteers must ensure that our creative environment is psychologically and physically safe for all participants.

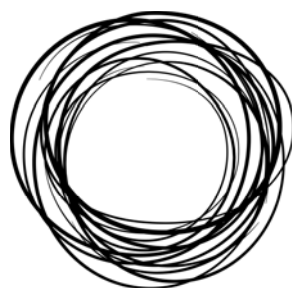


ARTWORK BY RAJSHREE JENA
PHOTO CREDIT: LAUREN GARBUTT



THANK YOU

**FOR SHARING YOUR
CREATIVE GIFTS WITH US**



**WILLOW
ARTS
COMMUNITY**
Create • Connect • Celebrate

366 St. Paul Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 3N2

www.thewillowcommunity.com | thewillowcommunity@gmail.com

905-328-9277