

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Willow Arts Community and Partner Organizations to Bring Free Arts Training to St. Catharines**

**ST. CATHARINES, ON, July 30, 2018** – People with lived experience of mental health and addiction issues in St. Catharines will soon have access to free, year-long multidisciplinary arts training classes thanks to a new partnership between Workman Arts (Toronto), Willow Arts Community, Rodman Hall Art Centre, Niagara Artist Centre, Niagara Region Mental Health, CMHA Niagara, Start Me Up Niagara, Oak Centre Clubhouse, and Mahtay Cafe. The project aims to bring meaningful opportunities outside of the mainstream mental health system to people with lived experience of mental health and addictions issues.

Through this initiative, the project partners want to raise awareness of the prevalence of social isolation in people with lived experience and the benefits of participating in the arts as an effective way to increase the sense of belonging to a community, expand social networks and build social skills. This evidence-based program has been successfully implemented in Toronto by Workman Arts for over 30 years.

Program participants are engaged in art training courses taught by local professional artists. The Open Studio hours at Rodman Hall Art Centre and seasonal art showcases provide opportunities for program participants to connect with their peers and the community and promote their art to the public. Individuals who self-identify as living with mental health and addiction issues are invited to join the program and register for free art classes in painting, music, performing arts etc.

Weekly classes will be held at Rodman Hall Art Centre and several other locations. All instructors are local, professional artists. Registration is taking place now for classes beginning in September. Interested participants can register by calling 905-328-9277 or by emailing [thewillowcommunity@gmail.com](mailto:thewillowcommunity@gmail.com). Visit [thewillowcommunity.com](http://thewillowcommunity.com) to learn more. Classes are free, but you must be registered.

For more information about the project please contact Nena Pendevska, Scaling Project Manager, Workman Arts Toronto, at [nena\\_pendevska@workmanarts.com](mailto:nena_pendevska@workmanarts.com) or 416-583-4339 ext 8, or visit: <https://workmanarts.com/programs-events/ongoing/scaling-project/>.

**Workman Arts** is an arts and mental health organization in Toronto known for its artistic collaborations, presentations, knowledge exchange, best practices and research on the impact of the arts on the quality of life of people living with mental illness and addiction. Workman Arts supports the creative goals of emerging and established artists with mental health and addiction issues by providing a safe, nurturing environment where artistic projects, professional opportunities and personal and professional networks are developed and fostered. [www.workmanarts.com](http://www.workmanarts.com)

Established in 2015, **Willow Arts Community** is a non-profit arts and mental health organization operating out of Rodman Hall Art Centre, in St. Catharines, ON. We provide multidisciplinary arts exploration, professional arts training, and an artist in residency mentorship program, all free to our member artists. Members work alongside others to build a distinct voice within the community through publications, performances, and exhibitions.

**Rodman Hall Art Centre** is a contemporary art gallery in the historic Thomas Rodman Merritt House, overlooking the Walker Botanical Garden that descends to the Twelve Mile Creek. Year-round, programming connects the community with art through innovative and thought-provoking exhibitions, events, and art classes for all ages.

**The Niagara Artists Centre (NAC)** is a not-for-profit, charitably registered, collective formed by and dedicated to serving the working artists and community of Niagara. NAC provides a forum for the development, exhibition and appreciation of contemporary art by providing facilities, equipment, professional expertise and a supportive atmosphere for arts research, advocacy and dissemination. NAC believes that the arts and a critical dialogue on the arts are integral to a healthy community.

**Niagara Region Mental Health (NRMH)** is a program within Niagara Region Public Health. Our multi-disciplinary staff work from a client-centred, recovery focused perspective to provide mental health assessment, individual and group treatment for individuals living with serious mental illnesses.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the recovery of individuals experiencing mental illness. **CMHA Niagara Branch** is one of a network of over 135 branches that offer mental health services in communities across Canada.

**Start Me Up Niagara** works with individuals who self-identify as mental health consumer survivors and are having a difficult time at this point in their lives. Start Me Up offers a variety of opportunities that improve health, increase the level of community integration, support housing and employment.

**Oak Centre Clubhouse** is an intentional community designed to foster a restorative environment where people can grow, build self-confidence, and experience themselves as citizens in creating a world for themselves and others.

**Mahtay Café** is a community-oriented café & lounge designed to let you explore food, coffee and art in a way that truly emphasizes your individuality and sense of adventure. Discover, embrace and taste the cultural tradition and spirit of sharing that is at the core of the healthy yerba mate lifestyle.