

Setting the Stage for Growth

Annual Report 2024-2025



Setting the Stage for Growth

Friends of Willowbridge,

This past year was one of laying strong foundations—a transformative period where bold ideas were matched with careful planning. As a team deeply rooted in our community, we know that responding to today’s challenges is not enough; we must also prepare for tomorrow.

In 2024–2025, we launched a ground-breaking gender-based violence treatment for women with developmental disabilities, made possible through the support of the Canadian Women’s Foundation. Recognizing the urgent need for prevention as well as treatment, we built on this success to secure new funding for Safe Relationships and Your Rights—a province-wide initiative that will provide accessible education and resources to help people with developmental disabilities build safe, healthy relationships. This program will launch next year.

We also expanded our work with children and youth, introducing Extensive Needs Services for those with complex medical, mental health and developmental needs. In addition, we received a grant to develop a model for our Ontario Autism Program, laying the groundwork for expanded supports in the years ahead. Together, these grants and initiatives open new doors for Willowbridge’s future growth.

Internally, we strengthened our capacity by restructuring our leadership team, welcoming a Social Enterprise Manager and advancing business planning to guide our next chapter. With support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we also began exploring the use of artificial intelligence to reduce administrative pressures, improve service delivery and share new AI skills with participants. These changes position us for the growth and transformation we envision.

None of this would be possible without our funders and community—thank you for being part of this journey. We’re just getting started!

With gratitude,



Courtney MacDonald,
Chair, Board of Directors



Leslie Josling,
Executive Director



Our Board of Directors

- Courtney MacDonald, Chair
- Carol Fraser, Vice-Chair
- Kathy Reston, Treasurer
- Wendy Easveld, Secretary
- Malcolm MacFarlane
- Esther Lin
- Joe Anderson
- Kim Schilter

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Mission and Purpose

Our Mission

To bring positive change to life in our community through services, supports and counselling so no one is left behind.

Our Purpose

A community where everyone leads their best life.

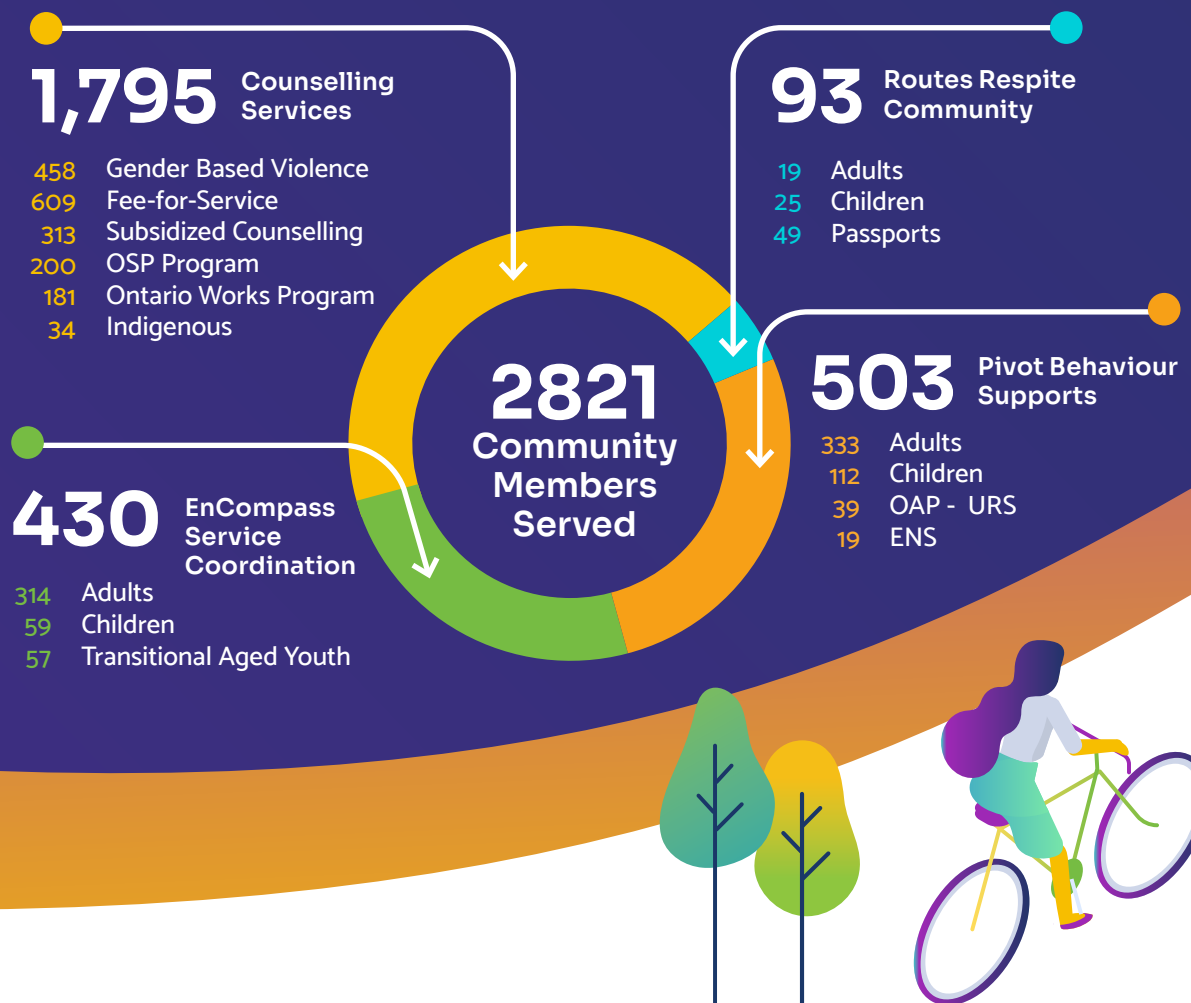
Our Values

- We believe that people are strong and uniquely capable.
- We view every individual as an expert on their own lives.
- We believe in our community.
- We appreciate the healing power of relationships.
- We value the diverse needs and perspectives of our community.
- We believe in services that are based on evidence and best practices.



2024-2025 Service Review

In 2024-2025, Willowbridge walked alongside individuals, couples and families by opening doors to belonging with support, connection and care.



Counselling Services

Our Counselling Team continued to grow this year—building new partnerships, reaching more people and delivering exceptional results.

With support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we expanded counselling for individuals with low incomes, helping more people access timely, affordable care. We also remain deeply committed to serving people with developmental disabilities and their families, and worked closely with our developmental service team.

The team focused on grief, trauma and parent-child relationships, and introduced single-session counselling to better meet urgent community needs.

We also strengthened partnerships with Grand River Community Health Centre and Community Living Six Nations, and welcomed seven new staff members and three student placements—investments in people that will fuel growth.



EnCompass Service Coordination

EnCompass expanded its support for people with developmental disabilities and their families—laying the foundation for stronger, more connected care.

With PIVOT Behaviour Supports, the team launched Care2Connect, a four-part family workshop series focused on self-care, community connection, sibling connections and smooth transitions. We also ran six life skills groups to foster independence, including cooking, internet safety and money management. The EnCompass, Routes Respite, Pivot and Counselling teams worked closely to streamline planning and better coordinate services to ensure individuals received more connected, person-centred care.

Thanks to continued support from an anonymous donor, the team also helped more people at risk of homelessness in Hamilton with grocery cards, cooking classes, personal care kits and more—small but powerful steps that make a big difference.



Routes Respite Community

Routes had another incredible year of growth, connection and creativity! With a new supervisor and four new staff, the team added new programs and strengthened its commitment to community inclusion.

Highlights included the launch of Java Junction—an in-house café where participants practice baking, money handling and customer service—and a new partnership with Autism Dog Services that brought on-site pet therapy and service dog training.

Giving back remained an important part of Routes, with participants volunteering at Ruffin's Pet Centres, the Brantford Public Library, Myrtleville House Museum, Mission Thrift Store and more.

After unexpected losses in our Willowbridge community, the Routes and Counselling teams came together to offer grief support through art therapy. We will always remember the friends we lost.

Pivot Behaviour Supports

The Pivot team expanded its reach this year by creating a Clinical Supervisor role, promoting three staff and welcoming four more, allowing us to strengthen our capacity to meet complex behavioural needs.

A major milestone was the launch of the Extensive Needs Service, developed in partnership with Contact Brant and Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services—providing wraparound, trauma-informed support for children and youth with complex needs.

Through our work with the Individualized Planning, Resource Development and Oversight (IPRDO) Program, we supported an individual with complex needs by managing their challenging behaviours and minimizing the need for restrictive interventions. This success improved their quality of life and illustrates how this approach can help others live more fulfilling lives.

The team also continued to work closely with Developmental Services Ontario and St. Joseph Healthcare Hamilton to reduce hospital stays and connect people to the right supports faster—ensuring individuals receive timely, coordinated care.



Creating a Welcoming Environment for Everyone

As part of our Strategic Plan, Willowbridge is committed to creating spaces where everyone feels they belong. This past year, our team made thoughtful changes to help our spaces grow and evolve alongside the individuals we support.



Riverside Hub

We were proud to make great progress on the Riverside Hub last year, laying the groundwork for the next phase of development. After completing official pre-consultation with the City of Brantford, we began approximately 30 detailed site studies to support our site plan application—looking at everything from parking to groundwater, soil, sun/shadow and archaeological considerations.

We've also begun mapping out floor plans and are preparing to apply for infrastructure funding, building permits and zoning requirements to address site-specific challenges. Community engagement will play an important role in shaping a final design that's welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all.

With the support of our trusted collaborators—the architects, planners, engineers and partner organizations who've dedicated their time and expertise—we've taken major steps in bringing this vision to life. It's our incredible team's belief in this project that keeps it moving forward, and we thank you for walking alongside us.

The Riverside Hub will bring together Willowbridge, Canadian Mental Health Association (Brant Haldimand Norfolk), Helping Ourselves through Peer Support & Employment, SOAR Community Services, Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services, Grand River Community Health Centre, The Bridge Brant, Friends 4 Kindness, Contact Brant, Community Living Brant and the Brant Community Healthcare System under one roof to offer a full range of services to help thousands of community members.



Creating Supportive, Inclusive Spaces

As always, Willowbridge is focused on creating spaces that reflect our commitment to safety, inclusion and dignity. Our team has been working hard to make our current space as welcoming and functional as possible while we prepare to grow into the new Riverside Hub facility.

Thanks to some fantastic community grants and one-time ministry funding, we were able to tackle some urgent infrastructure needs—including upgrades to our roof and HVAC system, as well as repairs to our front entrance after unexpected damages caused by wildlife. These enhancements have helped us create a more comfortable, welcoming and safe space for everyone who walks through our doors.

Fostering Belonging and Identity

While our focus remained on physical improvements, our teams also introduced programs that brought warmth and connection into our space.

Alongside our regular programs, events and groups, the Counselling Team launched two therapeutic groups: Art of Identity, an arts-based series that explored identity through creative expression, and a Parent Attachment Group that helped caregivers strengthen relationships through trauma-informed practices.

These initiatives reflect Willowbridge's commitment to creating spaces where individuals and families can feel safe, connected and valued. As we continue to grow, we're focused on shaping environments—both physical and emotional—that meet the evolving needs of our beautifully diverse community.



Shaping an Accessible and Diverse Tomorrow

As part of our strategic priority to create more inclusive, accessible supports, this year we focused on removing barriers and creating meaningful connections across our community.

Honoured for Community Impact

In spring 2025, we were thrilled to celebrate our Executive Director, Leslie Josling, who received the King Charles III Coronation Medal! Presented by the Canadian Women's Foundation, the award recognizes Canadians who go above and beyond to make a difference in their communities. Leslie was honoured for her decades of work championing gender justice, mental health and inclusive services, and for always pushing for a world where everyone feels they belong.

It was a proud moment for all of us at Willowbridge, and a reminder of how meaningful leadership can enable lasting change.



Creating Pathways to Support for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

With support from the Canadian Women's Foundation, we launched HER, a trailblazing healthy relationships initiative for women with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Offering a safe and healing space for those who've experienced gender based violence, HER aims to support the IDD community, which has been long overlooked in mainstream prevention efforts despite facing disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence.



This four-year project is co-led with Community Living Six Nations and supported by research from Nipissing University. Together with survivors, we're co-designing an accessible group program that blends clinical counselling approaches with developmental services expertise.

Building on this groundbreaking work, we secured over \$2 million in new funding through the Ontario Stands Against Gender-Based Violence initiative to advance prevention programming province-wide. Willowbridge will launch the Safe Relationships and Your Rights project next year and will co-design a book, videos and curriculum to help people with developmental disabilities build safer relationships and better understand their rights.

We're proud to be at the forefront of this essential and overdue work—and deeply grateful to our partners who walk with us as we build safer, more inclusive communities.

Self-advocates with lived experience are shaping the SRAYR curriculum every step of the way, making sure it reflects real voices and needs.



Outreach in Action

Throughout the year, we deepened relationships across the region by participating in events such as Pride, Doors Open Hamilton, Brantford's Newcomer Welcome Day, the Friends 4 Kindness Unbirthday Party and the Pathways to Transition Fair. We also hosted inclusive activities during Mental Health Week, joined World Autism Day, and participated in the Pride flag-raising celebration.

Building Capacity Through Training

To serve our community better, staff took part in training on mental health first aid, grief, trauma, human trafficking and more. We also joined conferences and leadership programs that helped us deepen our approach to inclusive, trauma-informed support. Additionally, our team participated in Cultural Sensitivity Training at Six Nations Community Living, explored Indigenous Cultural Safety in Mental Health, completed Introduction to Indigenous Matters and engaged in Inclusive Therapy: Embracing Neurodiversity and Developmental Differences.

We're committed to sharing what we've learned to strengthen our team and help build better support for the community.

Building Better Care Through Innovation and Excellence

As part of our commitment to innovation and excellence in service, Willowbridge continued to explore new tools, programs and ways of working—setting the stage for smarter, more connected care.

Leveraging Technology and Artificial Intelligence to Improve Care

This year, Willowbridge embraced innovation to improve accessibility and excellence in service—setting the stage for future growth through the use of artificial intelligence (AI). With grant support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we explored how AI can reduce the time we spend on paperwork, improve access to information and help staff focus more on what matters most: people.

With new AI tools in place, we're on our way to building a more responsive, inclusive organization. As we continue to grow, we're committed to using innovation to strengthen our services, reduce barriers and create a more connected experience for those we serve.



Willowbridge embraced a variety of AI tools, including ChatGPT, Microsoft Co-Pilot, an Ambient Scribe for therapists, and named AI Champions to guide our future work in AI.

Elevating Care Through Regulation

Ontario's new regulations for Behaviour Analysts raised the bar for safe, high-quality care—and we fully embraced the change. In response, we strengthened our structure and leadership, and we're proud to share that many of our Behaviour Analysts are now registered with the College of Psychologists, with more on their way!

These changes support more consistent, compassionate behaviour services and help set a strong foundation as we continue to grow.



Working Together

This year, we launched the Circle of Support—an innovative new way of working together to better support the people we serve. Through this approach, staff from different programs come together as one team to build a support plan that meets the whole person's needs.

Whether someone needs counselling, service coordination, behaviour supports, respite, or help with housing, this approach ensures our teams are connected and working together.

New Programs to Empower

In 2024-2025, our team offered a range of new, innovative and thoughtful programs, groups and events—all shaped by the interests and needs of the people we support. Activities included:

CARE2CONNECT

A family-focused workshop series to help families navigate common challenges, such as sibling dynamics and accessing community services.

HER

A treatment group to help individuals with developmental disabilities heal from the impact of gender-based violence and understand safe and healthy relationships.

JAVA JUNCTION

An in-house program that offers skill-building opportunities, including baking, managing inventory, money-handling and running a shop.

PET THERAPY PROGRAM

An on-site therapy dog program—offered in partnership with Autism Dog Services—that provided therapeutic support to clients and staff.

ART OF IDENTITY

An arts-based program focused on exploring identity through creativity.

VIRTUAL GAMES GROUP

A weekly online group that played games and socialized.

SOCIAL DROP-IN GROUP

A Hamilton-based group that encouraged peer connections and offered drop-in support.

ATTACHMENT MATTERS

A parent attachment group that helped caregivers strengthen relationships through trauma-informed practices.

WOMEN INITIATING NEW GROWTH & SELF-ESTEEM

A weekly group to help participants to develop a positive sense of identity.

CROCK POT COOKING

Classes that provided recipes, ingredients and cooking skills.

INTERNET SAFETY CAFE

A group that helped folks stay safe online.

MONEY MATTERS

A financial education class for community members.

Willowbridge Community Services was proud to receive re-accreditation through the Canadian Centre for Accreditation 2025-2029.



Paving a Path Toward Financial Sustainability and Growth

As part of our focus on financial sustainability and growth, we pursued funding that helped us expand services, support innovation and reach more people.

The Support Behind the Work

Willowbridge is grateful to have received a number of new grants and funding in 2024-2025 that enabled the agency to embark on new, high-impact projects as well as continue providing vital services.

We're honoured to have received the following funding, totalling **\$338,218**.

- + \$99,200 – Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed Grant - AI Pathways
- + \$85,168 – Community Living for Erie – IPRDO
- + \$42,700 – Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services – Facility Renewal Grant
- + \$33,300 – City of Brantford – additional counselling for people in receipt of Ontario Works
- + \$21,805 – Anonymous Donation
- + \$20,000 – Grand River Community Health Centre to enhance their counselling
- + \$14,400 – John A. Sanderson & Family Trust
- + \$8,622 – 100 People Who Care
- + \$8,023 – Lawson Ministries Hamilton
- + \$5,000 – Lansdowne Children's Centre – Kids First Funding

Grant Spotlight: Ontario Autism Program – Core Clinical Expansion

At the end of the fiscal year, Willowbridge was honoured to receive a high-impact grant through the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) to expand our supports in Brant County, Haldimand/Norfolk, Six Nations and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This expansion will build on our work in Urgent Response and Extensive Needs Services, allowing us to offer trauma-informed Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), caregiver counselling and therapeutic after-school programming.

This funding will help close long-standing gaps in care. The full program launch is anticipated in early 2026.

The new OAP funding will enable Willowbridge to launch after-school and camp programs, in-home assessments, family mental health supports and additional staff training.



Growing as an Employer of Choice

At Willowbridge, we know that creating lasting community change starts with creating a strong, supported team. Over the past year, we invested in tools, policies and culture to help our staff thrive as we look forward to growing in our community.



Investing in Our People

This year, we continued to prioritize staff perspectives, professional development and mental health. Our annual work-life and wellness survey helped shape ongoing engagement strategies, while our Wellness Committee organized BBQs, trail walks, pet therapy days and health challenges to bring moments of connection and care into the workday.

To support growth across the agency, we implemented a new performance evaluation module, launched a job referral reward program and introduced new policies around professional licensing reimbursement, infection prevention, artificial intelligence and flexible phone access for remote staff. We also welcomed student learners through field placements and summer positions—helping shape the next generation of professionals.

Modern Tools for a Modern Team

Willowbridge laid the groundwork for smarter, more efficient service delivery by streamlining our technology infrastructure. We migrated to a new cell provider, unlocking over \$28,000 in credits, and began decommissioning our aging Adobe server, saving \$6,000 annually. Additional investments included mobile docking stations, iPads for group facilitation and data collection, and “Owl” conferencing technology for accessible hybrid meetings.

In support of strategic innovation, Willowbridge implemented a new AI policy and completed training on ChatGPT and Copilot. These tools are already helping us reduce administrative time, improve documentation workflows and create more time for what matters most—people!

With more services launching and our team expanding, these investments ensure that Willowbridge continues to be a workplace where people feel supported, valued and ready to grow alongside the communities we serve.

In our spring 2025 Staff Satisfaction Survey, Willowbridge staff gave a glowing 4.6 out of 5 when asked if they're proud of working here—a powerful reflection of the heart behind our work!



Fueling Our Future Through Funding

As Willowbridge prepared for growth in 2024–2025, the generosity of our donors, partners and volunteers made it all possible. From financial gifts to community partnerships and hands-on support, your contributions expanded what's possible for the people we serve.



Our Everyday Heroes

Over the past year, Willowbridge continued to build a strong foundation for future growth. But none of our accomplishments would have been possible without the vital support of our donors.

In addition to our grants, we were honoured to receive nearly \$50,000 in donations! To each donor, we extend our heartfelt thanks. Your generosity has helped us bring change to life for individuals and families across our community.



Our Partners in Possibility

We are especially grateful to the community organizations that provided meaningful volunteer experiences for participants in our Routes Respite program. With your support, individuals built new skills, confidence and a sense of belonging. Thank you for investing in the future of our community.

- Ruffin's Pet Centres
- Brantford Public Library
- Riverview Terrace
- Brant County Museum and Archives
- Myrtleville House Museum
- Autism Dog Services
- Crossing All Bridges Learning Centre
- Mission Thrift Store



Our Helping Hands

With the support of dedicated volunteers—including our Board of Directors—Willowbridge continues to thrive. Volunteers play a key role in shaping our programs and services, and their contributions are felt throughout the organization.

To all of our helping hands, thank you. Whether you serve on a committee, assist with events, or share your time and energy in other ways, your efforts help create a stronger, more connected and inclusive community.

“I don’t know where we would be without the services provided through Willowbridge. They have and still provide invaluable help and resources!”
– Willowbridge participant



Financial Report

REVENUE	\$
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	3,184,942
Bethesda Grant	82,400
Donations and other revenue	200,040
Fees for Service	905,361
Other Government Grants	193,443
Passport Revenues	81,810
Capital funding	27,422
Total	4,675,418
EXPENDITURES	\$
Salaries and Benefits	3,750,289
Non-Salaried Expenses	490,331
Centrally Allocated Administration	316,009
Total	4,556,629
Excess (Deficiency) of Revenue over Expenditures	118,789

Contact Us

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Our Services

COUNSELLING SERVICES

- Family and Children
- Couples
- Groups
- Individuals
- Developmental Disabilities
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Indigenous
- Multicultural
- Men's Specific
- Women's Specific
- Single-Session
- Ontario Structured Psychotherapy
- Ontario Works Counselling
- Gender-Based Violence

PIVOT BEHAVIOUR SUPPORTS

- Adult Behaviour Supports
- Child and Youth Behaviour Supports
- Behaviour Support Plan Review
- Extensive Needs Service
- Community Training

ENCOMPASS SERVICE COORDINATION

- Adult Service Coordination
- Enhanced Service Coordination
- Child Service Coordination
- Transitional Age Youth Program
- Brief Service Supports

COMMUNITY INCLUSION SERVICES

- Routes Respite Community (Adults)
- Passports
- Summer Camps (Children & Youth)
- Groups

AUTISM SERVICES

- Ontario Autism Program Urgent Response Services
- Ontario Autism Program Core Clinical Services
- Counselling
- Respite