

Celebrating Art in the Garden 10 Years

“How, in our modern world, can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift again, to make our relations with the world sacred again?” –Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass



A message from Emily Carlson, Program Director

Dear Friends of OMA, I write with a heart full of gratitude. In 2022 we celebrated our 10th year of Art in the Garden, a partnership of OMA Center for Mind, Body and Spirit with the Borland Garden Cooperative. Your participation and support advances our ability to address the impacts of adversity and trauma on health and learning through anti-racist, joy-centered programming in arts and ecology.

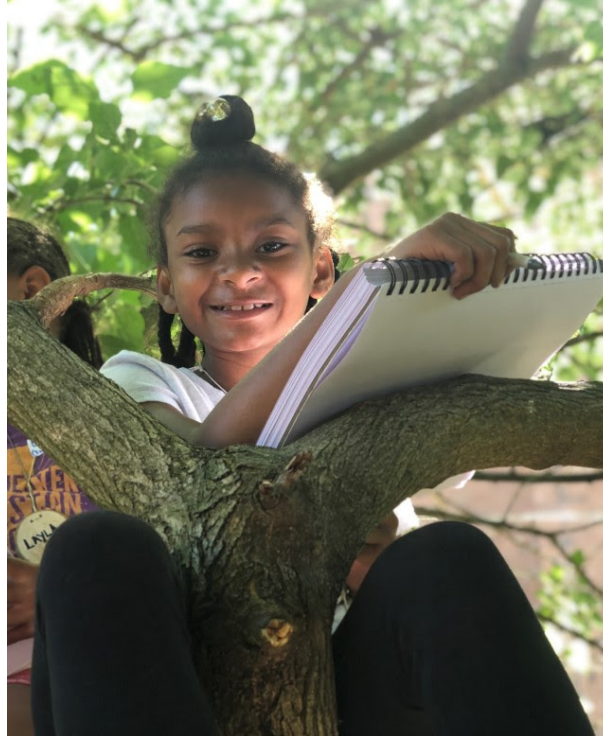
From where I'm sitting, I hear shouts of joy and laughter, see campers making glass mosaic stepping-stones with Pittsburgh Glass Center, doing a guided meditation, visualizing blowing a bubble which carries away unwanted emotions, and climbing a mulberry tree. Earlier this week campers made plant medicine from plantain with Pittsburgh Forest Garden, learned about native bird calls with Bird Lab, printed silkscreen t-shirts of an Eastern Towhee with the Andy Warhol Museum, and learned rhythms on djembe drums with Sankofa Village for the Arts. Teen counselors continued to develop their capacities for leadership with SOAR Coaching Academy, planted native flowers to

serve as habitats for pollinating insects and migrating birds, and picked stinging nettle to dry for making tea.



Trauma-Informed Care Trainings Support a Compassionate Approach

Art in the Garden hosted OMA's annual Trauma-Informed Care Training for our teachers, staff, families, and the wider community in June, prior to the start of summer programming. These trainings—led by experienced psychotherapists, educators, and mindfulness practitioners—support adults understanding the effects of trauma, strengthening conflict transformation skills, bringing a compassionate approach, and building skills that foster supportive relationships with youth. Trauma-informed care shifts the approach from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” The focus of our most recent training was “Creating Just and Compassionate Spaces with Youth, Families, and Community.” Sessions included “Why Trauma-Informed Care Must be Explicitly Anti-Racist,” “Trauma-Informed Care for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Individuals,” and “Restorative Justice Circles for Educators.” Interested in learning more? OMA offers a monthly webinar series, *You are Not Alone*, featuring panel conversations on trauma and recovery.



As a Tree Grows, Wider and Deeper

We are a community that embraces intersectionality, welcomes the whole of each person, and values our interconnection. Art in the Garden supports each person's ability to thrive and live their fullest expressions of themselves. Art in the Garden's summer program had record registration in 2022, with over 80 enrolled campers, 6 teen counselors, and a waiting list. We added a fourth group, which included hiring a fourth lead teacher and assistant teacher. We created a fourth outdoor classroom in Borland Garden, complete with stumps for sitting, movable parts for building, a mud kitchen, a hammock, and a sandbox. In response to teacher feedback last summer, we also hired a floating assistant teacher and program director assistant. It has been a great blessing to have Leah Morelli and Takeela Washington in these roles.

Vision to Expand Art in the Garden to Rankin, PA

Monica Daniels, who served as the lead teacher for 10-13 year olds in 2022, has approval from the Rankin Council to create a community garden. With OMA's support, Monica Daniels plans to extend Art in the Garden to her home community, offering S.T.E.M. and restorative justice programs to address gun violence and support families impacted by gun violence. In Monica Daniel's words, "Rankin is an underserved low-income community and the residents will benefit from Art in the Garden due to its life-changing curriculum and pedagogy and a connection to the environment." Monica Daniels is a certified Art Teacher and a certified Project Lead The Way S.T.E.M. Instructor. Her family has been impacted by gun violence and she has a calling to uplift her community.

Affirming, Strengths-Based Mental Health Support

To further support social and emotional well-being this year, we welcomed to our team licensed social workers Robin Clarke and Sandhiya Baladhandapani. Robin and Sandhiya provide affirming, strengths-based mental health support through small and large group sessions as well as individual counseling that engages art therapy, play therapy, and talk therapy. They provide mediation using nonviolent communication and restorative justice practices. They deliver ongoing assessments of camper needs and of dynamics between campers and staff. They offer guidance on how the teaching team can best utilize trauma-informed approaches. In addition, the therapists provide referrals, counseling, and resources for self-care to staff, caregivers and parents.

Robin and Sandhiya's presence has helped us to deepen our confidence in responding to campers through a trauma-informed lens. They have emphasized a vision, drawn from SITCAP (Structured Sensory Intervention for Traumatized Children, Adolescents and Parents), of a team-based trauma intervention program. A team perspective in trauma treatment observes that traumatized children do well when they can choose who they will allow to see their vulnerability and needs. Robin shares, "We all work together to strengthen our collective ability to deliver trauma-informed care and be available as a 'safe person' for any given camper. I have learned from the abundance of skill and experience among all team members." We are grateful that last summer Asata Brown, Art in the Garden teen leader, insightfully recommended adding a therapist to the team.



Restorative Justice Circles

“Far too often people think of themselves as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do it well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.” –Archbishop Desmond Tutu

At Art in the Garden we use restorative practices. Rooted in Indigenous teachings, these practices center our interconnection, empowering individuals in developing skills needed to proactively care for relationships and transform conflict. Restorative approaches to conflict are, by their nature, trauma-informed. Teachers and staff are trained in restorative justice circle facilitation. We hold restorative circles with campers, teachers, and staff throughout the summer.



Free Summer Meals & Composting

This summer Art in the Garden served over 2,400 healthy meals through partnerships with Earthen Vessels and Pure Grub. We know that communities struggling with poverty experience higher rates of diet-related disease. As the recent Food Research and Health Report states: “Poverty and food insecurity are social determinants of health, and are associated with some of the most serious and costly health problems in the nation.” To support the health of our community and the earth, all of the meals Art in the Garden serves are vegetarian/vegan and we compost all food scraps. Campers experience the importance of composting firsthand, witnessing the transformation of food waste into

fertile soil. Campers used the soil when planting cardinal flowers and wild blue phlox and learned about why these native species matter for the flourishing of migratory birds and pollinators.



The Climate Crisis as Teacher

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.” —Chief Seattle

Art in the Garden’s approach to ecology identifies the climate crisis as a teacher. When we look deeply we can see the effects of the climate crisis are entwined with histories of racism and colonial and capitalist practices. We see that the climate crisis reflects our *distance from* and difficulty *being with* the living world, including *being with* ourselves. Our work seeks to be a catalyst to create systems powered by love and justice, a catalyst to embrace all of ourselves—instead of turning away in moments of suffering and pain. When we reconnect, we see with utmost clarity that we are inseparable, that everything depends on each other. Our physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing is intimately connected with our environment. When we live from a place that honors our interconnection, when we use only what we need, we become leaders in undoing the harms of the climate crisis. Art in the Garden is committed to developing youth leaders who—in seeing our interconnection—are empowered to make choices not on behalf of self-interest but on behalf of the web of life.



Highlighting New Partnerships: The Andy Warhol Museum and Bird Lab

With the Andy Warhol Museum and Bird Lab, campers explored ideas of migration through the study of birds. We learned about the journeys of migratory songbirds that span oceans and continents and come to the Pittsburgh area to nest for the summer. In Bird Lab's sessions, we explored various aspects of birds' life cycles such as nest construction and how they find food on native plants. We listened to bird vocalizations and created our own songs to use in moments where words may escape us. We built nests using natural and human-made materials. We planted native plants to attract pollinators, knowing that they are good for humans, the food we grow, and the birds. In all of our activities we explored our interconnection.

Inspired by Bird Lab's content, Andy Warhol's printing process, and his Endangered Species Series, we had an opportunity to study birds through printmaking. On paper, t-shirts, and pillowcases, we printed the Northern Flicker, Eastern Towhee, Cooper's Hawk, and the Scarlet Tanager, all of which stop in Pittsburgh during travels to forage for food. We hope by appreciating birds that we cultivate love for the interdependence of our ecosystems. We also hope to contribute to developing the awareness of thoughtful, conscious people in the world who are able to make a multitude of connections between their daily lives and the lives of birds and other species.



Collaborating Organizations and Partnerships

Talented teaching artists and ecologists provide unique experiences for youth and families at Art in the Garden. Working with students in the garden daily they empower and build confidence, giving them opportunities to experience themselves as agents of positive change.

We are grateful to our partners for providing generous donations that fund meals, materials, and support stipends for artists, ecologists, and teen counselors: The Andy Warhol Museum, Bird Lab, Earthen Vessels Outreach, Hemispheric Conversations: Urban Art Project (HCUAP), Pittsburgh Glass Center, Reading is FUNdamental Pittsburgh (RIF), Rivers of Steel Arts (ROSA), Sensory Superpowers, UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, Youth Enrichment Services (YES). We are grateful to additional 2022 summer programming partners: Casa San Jose: Latino Immigrant Resource Center, Pittsburgh Forest Garden, Sankofa Village for the Arts, Pure Grub, SOAR Coaching Academy. We are grateful to the following partners for providing free programming space: Borland Garden, Eastminster Presbyterian Church, and The Kingsley Association.

Funding

We believe in systems powered by love and justice. We know that racism, sexism, and anti LGBTQ+ stigma harm economic security. We actively work against these systemic failures and persistent

disparities and refuse the idea that only children whose families can afford programming can participate in Art in the Garden. We know that together we can create a better world for all.

In the interest of equity, at least half of the spots are reserved for campers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), immigrant, or refugee and/or as low-income. In order to promote economic justice, Art in the Garden uses a sliding scale fee. Costs range from free to \$300 per week + \$20 enrollment fee. Over 30% of campers attend for free; 60% of campers can afford to pay less than half of the cost.

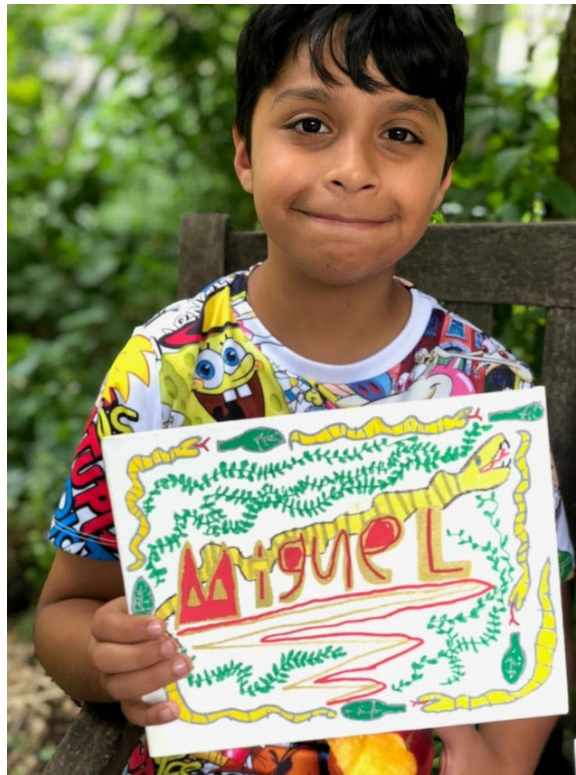
Camper scholarships for 2022 were fully funded with the support of our collaborating partners, ioby crowdsourcing (\$3,862), private donations (\$3,900), a donation from the Neighbor's Committee at East Liberty Presbyterian Church (\$2,000), a grant from The Refresh Fund (\$500), in-kind donations, and a grant from the Virginia A. McKee for the Poor Fund (\$7,500). Art in the Garden is supported, in part, by the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council through its Allegheny Arts Revival Grant (\$10,000). This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov. We are so grateful!



Our Growing Team

This year, to support four groups of students (ages 4-6, 6-7, 8-9, and 10-13) Art in the Garden's team consisted of 4 lead teachers and 4 assistant teachers, 6 teen leaders, 2 substitute teachers, 2 camp therapists, 5 parent volunteers, 1 floating teaching assistant, 1 program director assistant, 1

program director, and support from Borland Garden Cooperative and OMA Center for Mind, Body and Spirit.



Testimonials

“My daughter loved her week at camp, coming home with beautiful art, including the brilliant mulberry stains on her face. I loved the week as well, as I felt completely confident that I was leaving my child with a truly kind staff who welcomed her and cared for her particular needs. It felt a bit as if I were also leaving her in the care of the garden itself, which is a splendid, magical space where children can dig and play and learn.” -Art in the Garden parent

“Art in the Garden is the only job I’ve ever had where I can be myself and I am genuinely seen and celebrated, as are the other teachers and all the campers. The culture of community, care, and joy is magical to be a part of. Teaching this curriculum is meaningful to me because it provides crucial yet accessible life skills for anyone existing on the planet. This is the summer camp we all wish we had gone to as kids!” –Nina Ingram, Lead Teacher, Green Group

“Other camps don’t ask for my pronouns and I love how asks if I want to share my pronouns. People are more supportive here than other camps.” –Art in the Garden student

“Art in the Garden is a camp in the garden with art attached to it. It’s super cool that we have all different types of art workshops like drumming and graffiti. We get to do so much art. It’s outdoors

and active and has a bunch of fruit trees. I get to see my friends.” – Art in the Garden students, Purple Group

“Art in the Garden has free meals, and I love that.” – Art in the Garden student

“The Art in the Garden program has been a wonderful and transformative experience for me. Teaching and learning outdoors in nature has been a healing journey. The curriculum pedagogy and the lifestyle practices of the community makes the program influential for adults and children. As a PA Certified K-12 Art Teacher and Lead Teacher of Art in the Garden, I believe this has been a deep and meaningful professional development opportunity for me as an educator and community partner. Because of Art in the Garden, I now plan to facilitate a community garden in my neighborhood. More neighborhoods would benefit from programs similar to Art in the Garden.” Monica Daniels, Lead Teacher, Purple Group

“Art in the Garden provides an essential team approach to trauma intervention. As a therapist on staff at the camp, I have seen first-hand how beneficial it is for a child, adolescent, or teen to feel they can choose who their safe person will be, because any number of factors beyond our control—my tone of voice, my clothes, my approach—could remind them of a person who injured them. Because at AITG there are always several options for support from an adult who is prepared to provide trauma-informed care, campers are in a position of self-efficacy to choose how to be supported. And feeling the power to choose heals the helplessness of having once been a victim.” - Robin Clarke, Art in the Garden therapist

“Camp offered a safe, calm place for my daughter to do the kinds of basic things she does not get a chance to do at school and that bring her joy. She could sit, think, get dirty, pick fruit. Her teacher was soft spoken and had an even, calm energy that helped my daughter be more receptive to hearing about emotions and strategies for self-regulation.” -Art in the Garden parent

“This camp is perfect.” –Art in the Garden student

