



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Ariel Estrella (718) 254-9782
Ariel@groundswell.nyc

Mural Unveiling in Castle Hill, Bronx

“Be The Change” Declares Youth Mural in Castle Hill

Mural Dedication: Wednesday, August 31 at 4 pm
635 Castle Hill Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473

CASTLE HILL, BRONX – Through a monumental new mural, a team of young artists at the Castle Hill Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development, called their community into action by supporting youth voices. Their mural, entitled “**Be the Change**,” encourages elders to serve as mentors so that the young people of the Castle Hill Houses can become a force of positive change and inspiration at their development and in the surrounding neighborhood.

The 53 x 149 ft mural, created with the nonprofit **Groundswell**, will be unveiled at a dedication on Wednesday, August 31 at 4 pm.

The youth artists worked as part of Groundswell’s two-month long flagship summer youth employment program, the *Summer Leadership Institute*, presented in collaboration with the **Castle Hill Resident Association, New York City Council Member Ritchie Torres, and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)**. In lessons facilitated by **Lead Artist Angel Garcia** and **Assistant Artist Demetrius Felder**, the young artists researched, designed, and fabricated the mural.

This mural is part of Groundswell’s larger “Public Art / Public Housing” Initiative, in which five developments identified from the Mayor’s Action Plan (MAP) for Neighborhood Safety, one in each of the five boroughs, have co-created three mural projects, for a total of 15 new public artworks throughout the city.

The mural draws inspiration from two existing Groundswell murals recently completed at Castle Hill Houses on the topic of youth development. Using a series of colorful symbols, the mural creates a narrative of a young person on a journey to achieve their dreams. In the design, a young girl jumps through a portal to their personal enlightenment. She leaves behind broken chains and reaches for her success, represented by a basketball hoop. The positive messages, such as “Be the change you want to see in the world” and “Dream big,” encourage viewers to take action. To frame the mural, an older woman knits a basketball court at the heart of the Castle Hill community.

“Groundswell’s programs, including the *Summer Leadership Institute* and the ‘Public Art / Public Housing’ Initiative, which engages youth in public housing, resulted in astonishing murals throughout the city depicting themes of social justice and equality. They truly are inspirational and will leave a lasting impact on public housing developments. Groundswell and the City Council have had a successful collaborative relationship to lift up public housing residents and the results will now be visible throughout the city,” said **Council Member Ritchie Torres of the Bronx**.

“Thanks to the hard work and creativity of our young resident-artists, five developments across New York City are more beautiful than ever before,” said **NYCHA General Manager Michael Kelly**. “Vibrant public spaces like these give residents more reason to be proud of where they live – and NYCHA could not be prouder to share these works of art with all New Yorkers. With the leadership of Council Member Torres and the Groundswell team, our residents were able to tell their stories through painting – and those stories will live on at our developments for years to come, creating more connected NYCHA communities.”

“With their mural, the young artists have distilled the essence of youth development and potential at Castle Hill Houses,” said **Groundswell Interim Executive Director Rob Krulak**. “As the final mural in a three-part series dedicated to inspiring the next generation of leaders at the development, ‘Be The Change’ encourages young people to ‘dream big.’ Whether their vocations lead them to fields of art, medicine, education, or even space travel, the mural stands as a colorful reminder that nothing is beyond the reach of the young people of Castle Hill.”

Youth artist Mousa Conteh (17) had a personal connection to the process as a resident of Castle Hill Houses. About his experience, Mousa said, “For the upcoming year my plans are to see my choices of colleges and which one best fits me. I am an upcoming senior and since I know I’m going to college I just want to focus on that process. I am glad for this experience because it helped me create new roads and helped broaden my college search so that I can find a college best suited for my strengths and newfound abilities. Thanks to Groundswell I am more creative than I have ever been.” And thanks to Mousa’s contributions and the efforts of his entire team, the mural will be a lasting testament to youth power, creativity, and aspirations at Castle Hill Houses.

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This project is made possible through the “Public Art / Public Housing” Initiative supported with funds from the New York City Council under the leadership of Council Member Ritchie Torres.

Major financial support for Groundswell's 2016 Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) is contributed by the Altman Foundation, Brooklyn Community Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, Lambent Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Sills Family Foundation, Slomo and Cindy Silvian Foundation, and Tikkun Olam Foundation, in addition to numerous individuals.

SLI is made possible in part by public funds administered by the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, New York State Regional Economic Development Council, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Summer Youth Employment Program, the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity Work Progress Program, New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Council Member Brad Lander, and New York City Council Member Stephen Levin.

Groundswell is grateful to the Office of the Mayor of New York City.

Special thanks to Geraldine Lamb, Denise Jiles, Jose Rodriguez, Henry McDonald, Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, Nathaniel Parris, Josephine Bartlett, Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, Colgate Enterprise, and all those who helped on Community Painting Day.

About Groundswell

Groundswell, New York City's leading organization dedicated to community public art, brings together youth, artists, and community partners, to make public art that advances social change, for a more just and equitable world. Our projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented in the public dialogue. www.groundswell.nyc

About Council Member Ritchie Torres

Council Member Ritchie Torres was elected to office in November 2013 to represent the 15th Council District in the Central Bronx. As Chair of the Council's Committee on Public Housing; Councilmember Torres oversees the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). NYCHA is the largest provider of affordable housing in New York and the largest provider of public housing in the United States.

Only a month into his Chairmanship, Council Member Torres held the first ever committee hearing at a public housing development. His historic oversight hearing played an important role in securing the largest FEMA grant in NYC's history: \$3 billion dollars for the repair and resiliency needs of NYCHA developments damaged by Superstorm Sandy. He also presided over the largest investment of City and State funds in NYCHA in over ten years, directing hundreds of millions of dollars towards vital repairs to the City's public housing stock.

About NYCHA

The New York City Housing Authority's mission is to increase opportunities for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services. More than 400,000 New Yorkers reside in NYCHA's 328 public housing developments across the City's five boroughs. Another 235,000 receive subsidized rental assistance in private homes through the NYCHA-administered Section 8 Leased Housing Program.

To fulfill this mission and better serve residents while facing dramatic reductions in traditional government funding, NYCHA is developing new financing options and building innovative partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. These strategies help NYCHA address many key challenges, from preserving aging housing stock through timely maintenance and modernization of buildings to increasing resident access to a multitude of community, educational, and recreational programs, and job readiness and training initiatives. www.nyc.gov/nycha