

New York City Department of Probation, Groundswell and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District Awarded National Endowment for the Arts 2013 Our Town Grant

Our Town Grant for \$100,000 to Support “Transform/Restore: Brownsville” Mural Project in Brownsville, Brooklyn

New York, NY-- The NYC Department of Probation, Groundswell and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District announce that a \$100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts has been awarded to support the creation of a transformative mural project in Brownsville, Brooklyn entitled “Transform/Restore: Brownsville.” The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) recently announced 59 Our Town grant awards totaling \$4.725 million and reaching 34 states in the Our Town program's third year of funding.

The NYC Department of Probation is teaming up with Groundswell, New York’s leading non-profit organization dedicated to community public art, and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) to create “Transform/Restore: Brownsville,” a public art project focused on the transformation of vandalized walls into painted murals by young adults on probation. This participatory public art project is designed to engage high-risk young adults, local businesses, and community members in creating visible and permanent change in one of New York City's most challenged neighborhoods. Beginning in September 2013, Groundswell will work with young adults identified by the Department of Probation to conduct community interviews and surveys that identify Brownsville's hidden strengths, and then translate their findings into visual imagery for large-scale murals. As many as 40 young adults on probation will complete five large-scale public art projects to be enjoyed by Brownsville's 116,000 residents.

The project builds on the work of the Bloomberg Administration’s Young Men’s Initiative, an innovative civic engagement effort to put New York City’s high-risk black and Latino young men on a path toward achieving professional, educational, and personal goals. Brownsville has the highest concentration of public housing of any neighborhood in the nation, and 1 in 12 Brownsville men between the ages of 16 to 24 are in prison.

“When we launched the Brownsville Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) more than two years ago, one of our first priorities was developing opportunities for our clients to give back to their home community, which they may have harmed through their offenses,” said NYC Department of Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi. “Thanks to this generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, we will be able to build upon our already strong relationship with Groundswell and the Pitkin Avenue BID to make visible and permanent change in Brownsville, not just on the walls of Pitkin Avenue but also in the hearts and minds of people on probation.”

“Groundswell is thrilled to be awarded a prestigious NEA Our Town award to support ‘Transform/Restore: Brownsville.’ This grant will enable Groundswell to partner with the New York City Department of Probation and the Pitkin Avenue BID to provide talented youth and young probationers a highly visible platform to create lasting change within their own neighborhood. Through this innovative collaboration, Groundswell and our project partners will provide a model for other communities to use art as a tool for personal and societal transformation.”

“The Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District is pleased to be working with our partners, Groundswell and the City of New York, on this project to transform the physical landscape of Brownsville’s main commercial street,” said Pitkin Avenue BID Executive Director Daniel Murphy. “The BID’s mission is to create spaces where Brooklyn residents can feel a sense of safety, ownership and a positive connection with their neighborhood. Having young people from our community take the lead on these transformative art projects will further our shared vision to create more beautiful, livable streets in the heart of Brownsville, a place that our residents can be truly proud of.”

“Having worked with Groundswell many times in the past to use art to transform neighborhoods, we are thrilled to see Groundswell awarded this prestigious award, along with the NYC Department of Probation and the Pitkin Avenue BID,” said Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit Commissioner Nazli Parvizi. “We have seen over and over the power of public art in bringing pride to a community, cleaning up once-blighted areas and creating a sense of joy to all who pass by something beautiful and thought-provoking. The young artists in this program will know the role they play in creating a sense of community along Pitkin Avenue and it will do immeasurable good to the value they place on their roles as agents for positive change in their own neighborhoods.”

Through Our Town, the NEA supports creative placemaking projects that help transform communities into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core. The grantee projects will encourage creative activity, create community identity and a sense of place, and help revitalize local economies. All Our Town grant awards were made to partnerships that consisted of at least one nonprofit organization and a local government entity. The NEA received 254 applications for Our Town this year. Grant amounts ranged from \$25,000 to \$200,000 with a median grant amount of \$50,000.

“This is an exciting time to announce the Our Town grants as a national conversation around creative placemaking advances and deepens,” said NEA Acting Chairman Joan Shigekawa. “The NEA leads on this topic not only through our funding but through webinars, publications, and research. With these resources, we will help to ensure that the field of creative placemaking continues to mature, enhancing the quality of life for communities across the country.”

For a complete listing of projects recommended for Our Town grant support, please visit the NEA web site at [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov). Project descriptions, grants listed by state and by project type, and creative placemaking resources are available as well.

The NYC Department of Probation helps build stronger and safer communities by working with and supervising people on probation, fostering positive change in their decision-making and behavior, and expanding opportunities for them to move out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems through meaningful education, employment, health services, family engagement and civic participation.

The Mayor's Community Affairs Unit (CAU) is the direct link between the Mayor and New York's communities. CAU plays a pivotal role in improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers by working with neighborhood and civic organizations, nonprofits, and various City agencies to tackle large-scale issues and respond to emergency situations.

Groundswell brings together artists, youth, and community organizations to use art as a tool for social change. Our projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented in the public dialog. Groundswell is now celebrating our 17th anniversary as New York's leading organization dedicated to community public art. You can visit the Groundswell website at www.groundswellmural.org.

The Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District is an organization dedicated to creating and maintaining a clean, safe, vibrant and thoroughly liveable space within Brownsville Brooklyn's Main Street. The BID supplies supplemental sanitation services, helps maintains public safety, creates and implements public space beautification projects, stages special events, works to attract new and diverse retail, and promotes local retailers. The Pitkin Avenue BID was founded in 1996. Pitkin Avenue has been one of Brooklyn's most popular shopping destinations since 1896.

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