



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mural Unveiling in Tremont

**Volunteer Artists Celebrate Power of the Mind
to Combat Chemical Dependency**

Mural Dedication Ceremony: Friday, August 29 at 11am

Location: 764 E 176th Street, Tremont, Bronx, NY 10460

NEW YORK, NY – Groundswell, in partnership with VIP Community Services, is pleased to announce a dedication ceremony to celebrate the unveiling of a public mural, entitled “Bridging Transformation” to generate public awareness around the complex issue of chemical dependency.

Through an intensive six-week workshop, 20 VIP Community Services adult clients worked with Lead Artist Marc Evan and Assistant Artist Raul Ayala to complete the research, design, and creation of the 32' x 68' mural for VIP Community Services' state-of-the-art residential facility The Laura Parsons Residence for Men. In support of the recovery-based treatment program provided by VIP Community Services and its New York State partner the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), Groundswell collaborated with recruited volunteers at the facility to leverage the artmaking process as a catalyst for healing and self-discovery.

The research period started with a field trip to the American Folk Art Museum. Facilitated by Evan and Ayala, the project team explored the definition of hero through the lenses of mythological and historical symbolism. Inspired by the self-taught artists featured in the exhibition “Self-Taught Genius: Treasures from the American Folk Art Museum,” the project team set out to capture the rich ideas and themes which emerged from its discussions.

“The museum visit became the foundation for our discussion and design. As a group, we tapped into the process of how symbols creates meaning,” said one adult participant. “We put together a collage of imageries, brainstormed by the group together. Everyone contributed to a part of the final result.”

With an explosion of ideas, the mural celebrates the power of the mind. A collage of symbols harmoniously becomes the design's focal point, illustrating how many minds cohesively become one. For example, a turtle representing longevity is balanced by a whale symbolizing the aspiration to dream and achieve grand initiatives. Two reptiles – connecting the bottom part of the mural with the explosion of ideas on the top – represent the concept of rebirth.

“The mural creation process was transformative. Everyone initially thought it was impossible to work with one another, since none of us views ourselves as an artist,” said another participant. “It is truly amazing to be affirmed with the knowledge that we all have an artist in us after six weeks of work.”

“Through our partnership with Groundswell, VIP Community Services has been delighted to see our clients exploring sober living through the medium of art. This project has been an extension of our commitment to changing lives and transforming our community,” said Debra De Jesus Vizzi, President of VIP Community Services. “We were gratified to see engaged participation, the blossoming of artistic expression, and pure joyful partnering with Groundswell and our community partners.”

“Our project team really honed in on the idea of unleashing the inner artist to explore the creative potential in all of us,” said Lead Artist Marc Evan. “It’s been rewarding to be a part of this process and inspire self-sufficiency through social participation and potential gainful employment with each participant having obtained their scaffolding certificate.”

“This mural exemplifies the mission and spirit of Groundswell, demonstrating how the collaborative process can ignite individual passion and spark innovative ideas,” said Groundswell Founder and Executive Director Amy Sananman. “It is our pleasure to support the transformative work of VIP Community Services through this participatory art project.”

“This mural will not only help raise awareness of the painful experience of what it means to struggle with a chemical dependency, but will also serve as inspiration to what can be accomplished in life once such a dependency is overcome,” said State Senator Gustavo Rivera. “I am honored to have had the opportunity to join Groundswell, VIP Community Services and program participants in helping to paint this mural and being part of both the healing process and a new piece of street art in our community. I only wish I could have helped more.”

Bronx Council Member Ritchie Torres, who represents the neighborhoods serviced by VIP, will also be present at the unveiling. “This beautiful mural will cultivate much needed public awareness on the issue of chemical dependency and its impact on our neighborhoods,” said Council Member Torres. “The collaboration between Groundswell and VIP created a healing and transformative space for participants, who not only built supportive ties with each other, but were able to improve the overall quality of their community.”

“Bridging Transformation,” installed at The Laura Parsons Residence for Men, is made possible with funds through a generous anonymous gift. Additional support is provided by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS).

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 Office of Public Safety, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York City Department of Youth and Community

Development Summer Youth Employment Program, New York City Department of Education, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Groundswell is grateful to the Office of the New York State Attorney General; the Office of the Mayor of New York City; the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President; New York State Assembly Member Joseph Lentol; and New York City Council Members Brad Lander, Stephen Levin, Carlos Menchaca, and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.

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. This mural was completed as part of Groundswell's flagship program, the Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), which employs over 140 youth each summer as paid apprentices on mural projects that beautify neighborhoods and give voice to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented the public dialog. To follow a youth-driven social media campaign highlighting SLI, use #GroundswellNYC. www.groundswellmural.org

About VIP Community Services

VIP addresses the consequences of extreme poverty: substance abuse, housing, health care and employment. VIP Community Services is dedicated to changing lives and transforming our community. It offers a continuum of services to individuals with histories of chemical dependency. Its client-centered approach empowers people to take charge of their lives and discover their personal paths to self-sufficiency. www.vipservices.org

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