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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 28, 2015

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Mural Panel Unveiling for Midtown Community Court

**As New York City Struggles
to Transform its Juvenile Justice System,
Court-Involved Youth use Art as a Tool
for Personal Transformation**

Mural Dedication Ceremony: Thursday, May 28 at 5pm

Location: Groundswell, 540 President Street, Suite 1A, Brooklyn, NY 11215

NEW YORK, NY – Groundswell, New York City’s leading organization dedicated to community public art, and the Center for Court Innovation, a national leader in the effort to reform the justice system, unveil a mural panel series creating a powerful visual identity for the innovative restorative services provided by the Midtown Community Court. Entitled "Transformation," "Community," "Safe Place," and "Realization," the panels were created by court-involved youth artists and Groundswell peer leaders and will be installed for public display at the Midtown Community Court, which hears over 30,000 cases involving thousands of New Yorkers each year.

“Groundswell looks forward to unveiling another monumental new work of public art in collaboration with our longstanding partner the Center for Court Innovation, particularly one in such a meaningful location,” said Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. “Through the mural research and design process, not only did a group of talented young artists illustrate the essential services the Midtown Community Court provides thousands of young New Yorkers, but they have been empowered with the strength-based skills and knowledge they need to take ownership of their own futures.”

Through this project, seven teen artists, working under the guidance of Lead Artist Gina Marina De La Rocha Goico, created the panel series as part of Groundswell’s Segue opportunity, an afterschool program during which court-involved youth create public art projects for community-based partner organizations and learn the art and leadership skills necessary to transition Groundswell’s youth employment programs.

“The Center for Court Innovation and the Midtown Community Court are proud to partner with Groundswell on this exciting mural project focused on youth and the justice system,” said Dipal Shah,

Director of the Midtown Community Court. “Our phenomenal relationship with Groundswell provides us innovative opportunities to engage young people in an effort to reduce recidivism and change lives.”

The group began working on the mural series in January, meeting with Center for Court Innovation staff, taking field trips to relevant sites such as the Midtown Community Court, and conducting intensive research into the innovative model and social service supports which underlie its success.

Launched in 1993, the Midtown Community Court targets quality-of-life offenses, such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, shoplifting, farebeating and vandalism. Typically in these cases, judges are forced to choose between a few days of jail time and nothing at all—sentences that fail to impress upon the victim, the community and the defendants that these offenses are taken seriously. In contrast, the Midtown Community Court sentences low-level offenders to pay back the neighborhood through community service, while at the same time offering them help with problems that often underlie criminal behavior. The Midtown Court celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2013.

“During their research, our young people were impressed by Midtown’s commitment to a restorative, strength-based model,” said Lead Artist Gina Marina De La Rocha Goico. “From its Adolescent Diversion Program to the Human Trafficking Intervention Court, Midtown is offering individuals the opportunity to restore the harm done to their communities while ensuring they are provided the vital social service support they need to avoid future contact with the justice system. In the mural series, these young people have conveyed the transformative impact interventions such as these can have, both on individual lives and on entire communities.”

The panel series consists of four panels. These panels are grouped around four main themes the youth artists felt are encompassed within Midtown Community Court’s approach. These include self-knowledge, safe space, personal transformation, and community transformation. The panels are rendered with a vibrant color palette to visually engage viewers in their positive message. Text emphasizes the transformative potential of innovative models like Midtown’s: “Today is tomorrow’s yesterday. Today is the day where I transform.”

This project is made possible through the generous support of the Center for Court Innovation and the office of Councilmember Helen Rosenthal. Major financial support for Groundswell’s 2014-2015 Segue program is also contributed by Altman Foundation, Ethel and W. George Kennedy Family Foundation, Lambent Foundation, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Sills Family Foundation, and Variety The Children’s Charity of New York, in addition to numerous individuals.

Segue is made possible in part by public funds administered by the New York State Office of Public Safety, New York State Council on the Arts, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Groundswell is grateful to New York State Assembly Member Joe Lentol; the Office of the Mayor of New York City; the Office of the Speaker of the New York City Council; the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President; and New York City Council Members Brad Lander and Carlos Menchaca.

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.groundswellmural.nyc

About the Center for Court Innovation

The Center for Court Innovation seeks to help create a more effective and humane justice system by designing and implementing operating programs, performing original research, and providing reformers around the world with the tools they need to launch new strategies. www.courtinnovation.org

About the Midtown Community Court

The Midtown Community Court, established in 1993, hears cases where defendants are charged with misdemeanor offenses, such as prostitution, illegal vending, graffiti, and possession of marijuana. Midtown sentences offenders to community service to pay back the neighborhood in which they committed their crime and provides them with social services to address their underlying needs. www.courtinnovation.org/project/midtown-community-court

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