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Groundswell's Founder and Executive Director to Join the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Amy Sananman Appointed Executive Director of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety

NEW YORK, NY – Following 19 years as Executive Director of Groundswell, Amy Sananman will join the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice in September 2015.

"I welcome the opportunity to take the collective impact lessons we have demonstrated at Groundswell and put them to the test to address neighborhood safety at target NYCHA developments across the city," said Sananman. "I am honored and humbled to continue to serve and support justice and equity in and for the communities that I have worked with for over 25 years."

"We are thrilled that Amy will be joining our team as director of one of our most important projects – the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety," said Elizabeth Glaser, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. "Her decades of experience improving neighborhoods throughout New York City will be a major asset to our office as we seek to make New York City's neighborhoods safer and more livable."

Groundswell Board Chair David Goldstein announced a committee has been formed to find a successor. "Through her vision and commitment to cross-sector engagement, Amy has connected the power of the hand-painted mural to community activism across New York City. Groundswell will now embark on a critical transition from a founder-led organization to one with a board selected leader. There is no better moment for Groundswell to embrace this pivotal step. Groundswell programs and impact are steadily deepening and the organization's financial health is stronger than ever."

As Sananman prepares for a new chapter in her professional career, she leaves behind a legacy of 450+ monumental public artworks in more than 75 New York City neighborhoods. During her tenure, Groundswell grew from a single mural project organized with Mexican youth living in Williamsburg to an established cultural organization with a \$2M + annual budget that engages 60+ community-based partners in the creation of 50 murals each year, covering over 30,000 square feet across New York City annually.

"Through our partnership, Groundswell provided students in JPMorgan Chase's program, The Fellowship Initiative (TFI), with an invaluable learning opportunity," said Linda M. Rodriguez,

Executive Director of The Fellowship Initiative, Global Philanthropy at JP Morgan Chase & Co. “Under the direction of Groundswell's talented teaching artists, the TFI Fellows created beautiful, powerful visual representations of their futures. We applaud Groundswell's commitment to empowering youth to share their experiences and dreams through art.”

In 2010, Sananman spearheaded the opening of a vibrant studio space in Gowanus for Groundswell, which today houses year-round programming that engages 800 New York City youth annually, overseen by 14 staff members and supported by a roster of 25 professional artists. Groundswell's strength-based youth development model prepares youth participants with the inspiration, tools, and agency to take ownership of their future. Since opening its studio, Groundswell has achieved an 85% college acceptance rate for core youth participants and a 95% acceptance rate for Portfolio Development participants at fine art college.

“During my time at Groundswell, I have worked on so many different social justice topics. Immigration. Gentrification. The conflict between police and civilians,” said youth participant Nathaniel James. “My first project tackled domestic workers and helped give voice to people doing underprivileged and undervalued work. My mother is part of her own business for childcare, so giving voice to these individuals, many of whom are new to our country, resonated with me. I've had the privilege of being the youth media representative for many of my projects. It takes my ownership of each project to a new level. I can interpret my team's work and express it, not just with other youth and our partners, but with the general public. The public speaking skills I have learned at Groundswell strengthen my commitment to New York City.

James continued, “When you think of a Director of a nonprofit or corporation, you envision someone out of touch and out of reach. Amy Sananman is not that. When you come to Groundswell's studio, Amy is accessible – to youth, to staff, to partners. She is down to earth and relatable, but visionary. She has shared that vision with all of us and makes us feel a part of it.”

As Sananman built Groundswell as an organization, she developed longstanding and sustained partnerships with leading national funders, including the Altman Foundation, Lambent Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and William T. Grant Foundation. In 2012, the National Endowment for the Arts awarded Groundswell a prestigious Our Town award to support the creation of a transformative mural project in Brownsville, Brooklyn. 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. Together with the New York City Department of Probation (NYC DOP) and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District (BID), Groundswell launched “Transform/Restore: Brownsville,” a public art project focused on the transformation of vandalized walls into painted murals by young adults on probation.

“Groundswell has been an amazing partner,” said Karen Armstrong, Assistant Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation. “Amy and her staff have introduced NYC DOP and our clients to an avenue of change that people looking in from the outside could never imagine the impact it would have on young people involved in the criminal justice system. I often tell our clients that

there are so many people fighting for you and your community who you have never met. Amy is one of these of people. She is an outstanding leader who is always truly present and committed.”

In 2013, Sananman led the development of Groundswell’s theory of change model, Scaffold Up!™, which outlines how Groundswell collectively impacts youth, partner organizations, and the field of public art. Today, Scaffold Up! serves as a case study for other community-based organizations interested in developing a transparent set of promises they can make to their stakeholders based on research and theory as well as an interactive evaluation strategy that allows all stakeholders to systematically track how well these promises are being kept.

“People always tell muralists, ‘It must feel so great to leave your mark on the city.’ With all their good intentions behind that comment, it misses the major point, especially when it comes to Groundswell,” said artist Katie Yamasaki. “It isn’t about the artist leaving their mark. It is the mark of the community, the teen artists, and the neighborhood collaborators all coming together in this creative vehicle of a mural to commune with the public over a topic that is critical to them. The creative vehicle – the platform created by the mural for the community – that is Groundswell. That was Amy’s vision almost 20 years ago. Because of her vision, thousands and thousands and thousands of people have had a voice and the opportunity to leave *their* mark on this great city.”

As the organization prepares to start its third decade of social change work, Groundswell will embark on a major campaign to leverage its unique collective impact model for future growth. Beginning in May 2017, a series of city wide celebrations around the theme “Summer of the Painted City” will activate new audiences, build awareness and visibility, and amplify the voices and visions of the artists, youth, partners, and activists that have been central to the work since Sananman first launched Groundswell in 1996.

“Art has created a strong Groundswell community,” said Sananman, “and that growing community will continue to make change across our city and beyond.”

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

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