



540 President Street, Suite 1A, Brooklyn, NY 11215 | 718.254.9782 | www.groundswell.nyc

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 25, 2016

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

Mural Unveiling in Stapleton

Staten Island's Heritage Captured by Youth-Led Mural

Mural Dedication: Monday, August 29 at 10 am
230 Broad Street, Staten Island, NY 10304

STAPLETON, STATEN ISLAND – Through a new mural, youth artists engaged seniors at the **Stapleton Houses** in a public dialogue about the development's past and future as a site of hope, dreams, and community engagement. Their mural, entitled “**Empowering the People, Transforming Our Home,**” combines Staten Island landmarks with images of activism and resilience to build a lasting conversation about the Stapleton Houses' heritage, history, and legacy.

The 106 x 15 ft mural, created with the nonprofit **Groundswell**, will be unveiled at a dedication Monday, August 29 at 10 am.

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 **Stapleton Resident Association, New York City Council Member Ritchie Torres, and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)**. In lessons facilitated by **Lead Artist DonChristian Jones** and **Assistant Artist Lina Montoya**, 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 design explores key Staten Island landmarks to illustrate the importance of building local community. In a field in front of the Verrazano Bridge, raised hands grow out of a garden of flowers. The hands grip onto the vines as a symbol of peace and anti-violence. Tree roots that spell out “Stapleton” support an above-ground train and a grandmother hangs laundry out to dry on a clothesline that spans the landscape, symbolizing nature and the community members as the infrastructure of the neighborhood.

“Groundswell's programs, including the Summer Leadership Institute and the ‘Public Art / Public Housing’ Initiative, which engages youth in public housing, have 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.”

“Inspired in part by the community slogan ‘guns down, fists up,’ the artists brought a sense of peace, community, and hope to the Stapleton Houses with their mural. In the design, an open book reveals a colorful, imaginative vision of Staten Island. This mural welcomes all visitors to the Gerald Carter Community Center with an energetic dream of Staten Island’s future,” said **Groundswell Interim Executive Director Rob Krulak**.

“My biggest success on this site was finishing it,” said **youth artist and Stapleton Houses resident Quinshawn Williams** (19). “I worked hard to make something for my community with all my partners who made it very memorable every day. Every time I hear someone say they love it, it makes me feel so proud. Now when I pass it by I look back at all the fun I had creating this mural for my community.”

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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 Silvan 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 Parker, Phillip John, Stapleton Neighborhood Senior Center, Gerald Carter Community Center, Josephine Bartlett, Principal Higgins, Fahtima Spicer, Claire Jimenez, Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, 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