



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mural Unveiled at Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island

**Through Art, Incarcerated Young Women
Imagine Restorative Futures**

Mural Dedication Held: Thursday, June 11 at 12:00 pm

NEW YORK, NY – Groundswell, in partnership with the NYC Department of Correction and NYC Department of Education, celebrated a mural unveiling at a dedication held earlier today. Designed by a talented team of young women at the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island, the mural imagines restorative futures for themselves and other women who have been or are incarcerated.

To create this mural, entitled “The Freedom Within,” the team of young women artists reflected on their personal experiences during an intensive public artmaking program, presented with the support of the New York City Council through its STARS Citywide Girls Initiative. Lead Artist Jessica Poplawski and Assistant Artist Lauren Baccus led the programming for the youth, and as a team they created the message and design that reflected the transformation necessary to create positive restorative futures.

“The arts have increasingly grown as a powerful mechanism to share powerful messages inspired by personal struggles and challenges that can empower both the artist and spectator. Through public-private partnerships, we can encourage people of all backgrounds to tell their story in the most creative and imaginative way. The Freedom Within is a beautiful mural that will serve as a beacon of hope for the women at the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island. As Chair of the Committee on Women’s Issues and a Member of the Committee on Cultural Affairs in the New York City Council, I look forward to creating similar opportunities that will uplift all women across the City of New York,” said Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo.

DOC Commissioner Ponte said, “The Groundswell mural has provided a welcome opportunity for young women at Rose M. Singer Center to express themselves in a meaningful way. This artwork stands as a symbol of their desire and potential to rebuild their lives. I thank everyone involved.”

“Creating hope in youth makes a difference in their long-term success after incarceration,” Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. “At Groundswell, we believe art can be the tool to inspire that hope. This mural proves this possibility as real. The team captured its ability to come away from their experiences stronger than ever before.”

The mural features a young woman in transformation. From the center of the mural, she gazes upward toward her future. Nature imagery surrounds her. Her multi-colored hair turns into rolling hills, her body swirls into whirlpool, and above her a ray of sunshine breaks through the clouds. The woman's hand emerges from the whirlpool. The hand holds a deep red rose with thorns, signaling the struggles and eventual triumphs of their transformation.

This project is made possible with public funds from the New York State Office of Public Safety and the New York State Council on the Arts. Special thanks to New York State Assembly Member Joe Lentol.

Public support is also provided by the New York City Council through its STARS Citywide Girls Initiative and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Special thanks to New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Council Member Julissa Ferreras, and New York City Council Member Laurie Cumbo.

The STARS Citywide Girls Initiative, funded at \$1 million by the New York City Council, will offer the City of New York a unique opportunity to support the healthy development of thousands of girls and young women of color in the coming year.

The STARS Citywide Girls Initiative is a collaboration of six leading NYC nonprofits that will help girls and young women of color overcome barriers to success, grow emotionally, academically and physically stronger, and develop as leaders in their communities. The six partners—Girls Write Now, Groundswell, Lower Eastside Girls Club, PowerPlay NYC, Row New York, and Sadie Nash Leadership Project—all leaders in after-school and summer programming, will create 1,000 or more new program slots for girls in all five boroughs by June 2015.

With support and funding from the New York City Council, the STARS Citywide Girls Initiative will develop the life and leadership skills of NYC girls through after-school and summer sports, academic enrichment, STEM, college preparation and the arts. The launch of STARS will provide vital services to communities in all five boroughs to ensure that girls have access to a broad array of opportunities in team sports, college prep, financial literacy and technology—experiences that can prepare them for successful adulthood.

Additional support provided by the Bay and Paul Foundations and the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation.

Additional thanks to NYC Department of Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte, Deputy Commissioner Winette Saunders, Principal Tonya Threadgill, Assistant Principal Jeffrey Robbins, Ebony Dunn, and Mary Runyan.

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 the NYC Department of Corrections

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) provides for the care, custody, and control of persons accused of crimes or convicted and sentenced to one year or less of jail time. The Department manages 15 inmate facilities, 10 of which are located on Rikers Island. In addition, the Department operates two hospital Prison Wards (Bellevue and Elmhurst hospitals) and court holding facilities in Criminal, Supreme, and Family Court in each borough.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doc/html/home/home.shtml>

About the NYC Department of Education

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is the largest school district in the US, serving 1.1 million students in over 1,800 schools. The New York City Department of Education is committed to working collaboratively with parents, families, educators, and communities to improve student achievement and ensure that every child graduates from high school prepared for college, a career, and a future as a critically-thinking adult. <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/default.htm>

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