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Mural Panel Unveiling in Brownsville

Young Brownsville Women Declare

“We Are... Powerful” Through Mural

Mural Dedication Ceremony: Saturday, June 27 at 12:00 PM

Location: 1522 Pitkin Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11212

BROWNSVILLE, NY – Groundswell, the New York City Department of Probation (NYC DOP), and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) are pleased to announce the unveiling of a monumental mural along historic Pitkin Avenue. The mural explores the hidden treasures of Brownsville’s industrious women leaders. With this mural, the artist team, consisting of only women, identified women’s contributions to community activism while affirming their own power and strength.

This artwork was created as part of “*Transform/Restore: Brownsville*,” a two-year participatory public art project focused on the transformation of vandalized walls into painted murals by young adults on probation. Launched with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) through its national Our Town initiative, “*Transform/Restore: Brownsville*” is designed to engage young adult probation clients, local businesses, and community members in supporting the creation of visible and permanent change in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

Since the start of project, Groundswell has worked with young adults identified by the Department of Probation to conduct community interviews and surveys that reveal Brownsville's hidden strengths and then translate their findings into visual imagery for large-scale murals. This mural, the fourth in the series, focused on women both in message and in participation.

To create this message, the youth women participated in an intensive artistic training, presented with the support of the New York City Council through its STARS Citywide Girls Initiative. 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.

Purples, violets, pinks, and a calm sunset yellow combine for the color palette of this inspiring mural. The mural centers on a large book opening to reveal three portraits of Brownsville women, haloed by a light of inspiration. To their left, Brownsville buildings stand strong and tall. Two hands create the shape of a cracked heart with a bandage over the wound, illustrating the need to end then heal violence against women. The words “We are...” hang to the right of the women. From this prompt

comes empowering answers, such as “entrepreneurs,” “artists,” “protectors,” and “fighters.” These images are all framed with a series of crisscrossed arms grasping each other in support, community, and care.

“This mural acknowledges how women are the backbone of the community and should be recognized for their invaluable contributions—past, present, and future,” said Daniel Murphy, Executive Director of Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District. “Women must be seen in all their multiple positions: as the entrepreneurs, the volunteers, the stay-at-home mothers, the policy makers and innovators, the community activists, the civic and religious leaders, and as the educators for our Brownsville.”

“We hope all women will be empowered and inspired by the mural,” NYC DOP Commissioner Ana Bermúdez. “It recognizes the many contributions women have made to Brownsville. Viewers who do not yet appreciate Brownsville women’s contributions will have a change of heart in their perceptions and their treatment of women within the community.”

“Since we began envisioning the ‘Transform/Restore: Brownsville’ mural series, Groundswell took care to understand the valuable contributions of every member of the Brownsville community,” said Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. “With the inclusion of the STARS Citywide Girls Initiative, this project can continue that vision by addressing experiences that can often be overlooked even in the most progressive of movements: the experiences of women of color. This mural celebrates the agency of Brownsville’s powerful women through using art as a tool of social change.”

This project is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, through its national Our Town initiative; New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Council on the Arts, through the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Initiative; and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District.

In addition to the “*Transform/Restore: Brownsville*” initiative, this mural was also part of the STARS Citywide Girls Initiative. 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.

Special thanks to New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Councilmember Julissa Ferreras, New York City Councilmember Laurie Cumbo, and New York City Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez.

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

The New York City Department of Probation helps build stronger and safer communities by working with and supervising people on probation, fostering positive change in their decision-making and behavior, and expanding opportunities for them to move out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems through meaningful education, employment, health services, family engagement and civic participation. www.nyc.gov/html/prob/

The Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District is an organization dedicated to creating and maintaining a clean, safe, vibrant and thoroughly livable space within Brownsville Brooklyn's Main Street. The BID supplies supplemental sanitation services, helps maintain public safety, creates and implements public space beautification projects, stages special events, works to attract new and diverse retail, and promotes local retailers. The Pitkin Avenue BID was founded in 1996. Pitkin Avenue has been one of Brooklyn's most popular shopping destinations since 1896. www.pitkinbid.org

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