



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mural Unveiling in Long Island City

Youth Artists Promote Holistic Wellness Through Fantastical Mural

Mural Dedication: Wednesday, August 31 at 10 am
10-25 41st Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101

LONG ISLAND CITY, QUEENS – A team of young artists have inspired a holistic view of healthy living at the **Queensbridge Houses** through a new mural on the Jacob A. Riis Settlement House community center. Created in response to the community's tradition of memorial shrines and murals, the youth tackled health issues faced by Queensbridge residents such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, food access, mental wellness, and gun violence. Their mural, entitled “**The Balance – The Four Faces of Health,**” stands in honor of all lives at the development—past, present, and future.

The mural, created with the nonprofit **Groundswell**, will be unveiled at a dedication on Wednesday, August 31 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 **Queensbridge Tenant Association, New York City Council Member Ritchie Torres, and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)**. In lessons facilitated by **Lead Artist Misha Tyutyunik** and **Assistant Artist Victor A. Saint-Hilaire**, 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 presents a vision of holistic health through symbols hidden within a mythical sphinx, which represents a healthy, strong, and proud community. Physical health is shown as a figure with an apple for a head (representing both healthy eating and the “Big Apple”) lifting weights. Mental health is a scene of a man holding up his community, illustrating the importance of each individual in building their community. A heart framed by a flower crown represents emotional health, and spiritual health is depicted as a scale balancing the sun and moon. Through these playful depictions of the elements of healthy living, the artist team hopes to bring joy to the Queensbridge community as the mural promotes a holistic view of wellness.

“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.”

“Using the mythical sphinx to carry their message, the fantastical imagery of this mural captures a holistic view of wellness and its meaning for Queensbridge youth and the community at large. The design references the young artists’ interpretations of healthy living, emphasizing the importance of connecting physical, mental, emotional, and community wellness. The artists of ‘The Balance – The Four Faces of Health’ have leveraged the power of socially engaged art and made a thoughtful contribution to the Queensbridge community,” said **Groundswell Interim Executive Director Rob Krulak**.

“I loved painting murals and helping out my community this summer,” **youth artist and Queensbridge Houses resident Kevin Perez** (21) said about his experience working on the mural. “It’s really changing my life. It’s been very inspiring and I enjoyed working with different Groundswell teaching artists. My plan for this coming year is to be better with myself and fix my life around to set up goals.”

Through Kevin’s example and the work of the other youth artists, “The Balance – The Four Faces of Health” stands as a call to action for a healthier way of life for all residents at Queensbridge Houses by encouraging balance in all areas of life.

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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 Altman Foundation, Brooklyn Community Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, Lambent Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Sills Family Foundation, Slomo and Cindy Silvian 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 April Simpson, Joyce Tseng, Christopher Hanaway, Veronica Franklin, Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, Josephine Bartlett, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Colgate Enterprise, 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