



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Mural Unveiling in Brownsville**

**Youth Artists  
Transform Brownsville with Portraiture**

**Dedication:** Friday, August 28 at 3 pm  
1478 Pitkin Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11212

**BROWNSVILLE, NY** – Every person in a community should be recognized for his or her contributions, but there are often not enough opportunities to reflect on the people who make a neighborhood vibrant. This summer, court-involved youth recognized one community’s residents through a mural in Brownsville. 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 53 x 80 foot mural along historic Pitkin Avenue, entitled “The Wall of Reflect.”

This mural 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 adult probation clients alongside Groundswell youth leaders. 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.

Over two years, the initiative will engage 90 youth (40-60 of which are court-involved) and hundreds of community participants through a proven collaborative artmaking model. The initiative will benefit Brownsville’s entire population of 116,000 through a strengthened business district and resulting quality of life improvements.

The final mural in the series utilized the tradition of the People’s Art practice through extensive interviews, youth-led design, and community paint days. The mural challenges the division of “high” and “low” art by using the template of a salon to paint Brownsville residents. Brightly colored designs span the length of the wall like wallpaper, incorporating elements of ironwork fence designs from around the neighborhood. Throughout, styled frames are painted to highlight portraits of Brownsville residents, created by Lead Artist Crystal Bruno, Assistant Artist Jose de Jesus Rodriguez, the youth participants and Brownsville volunteers.

“Over the last two years, both Brownsville and dozens of youth artists have been transformed through the ‘*Transform/Restore: Brownsville*’ series. It makes sense that this mural serves as the capstone to this project. The team brought in the community through intentional, thoughtful practices at every step of the process, revealing the hidden treasure of the community support in the process,” said Daniel Murphy, Executive Director of Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District.

“For the last two months, the youth on this project have shown tremendous commitment, resilience, and creativity. They have discovered their own impact on the community and have found their voice as community leaders. By highlighting their art, they have inspired us all,” said NYC DOP Commissioner Ana Bermúdez.

“This mural is inspired, in part, by Chicago’s famed 1967 Wall of Respect, a mural that helped launch the community arts movement in the United States. We at Groundswell are privileged to help carry this tradition forward in Brownsville in collaboration with the community and our youth artists. This monumental mural will be a new landmark in Brownsville, rooted in the neighborhood’s history and traditions,” said Groundswell Executive Director Rob Krulak.

“The Wall of Reflect” encourages not only all Brownsville residents to honor themselves, but also inspires all of New York to celebrate this engaged community. As one youth artist stated, the process provided everyone the opportunity to gain wisdom: “Through the painting of this mural, the elders’ voices from the community were made much more visible because their concerns were for bettering the younger generations and having more activities for them.” By bringing to life the beauty and strength of Brownsville, Groundswell artists truly celebrated the community’s ‘hidden treasures’ – the neighborhood’s community members.

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This project is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, through its national Our Town initiative, and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District.

Major financial support for Groundswell's 2015 Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) is contributed by Altman Foundation, Brooklyn Community Foundation, Charles Lawrence Keith and Clara Miller Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, Ethel & W. George Kennedy Family Foundation, Lambent Foundation, M & T Bank, Nathan & Fannye Shafran Fund, Pinkerton 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 Office of Public Safety, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Summer Youth Employment Program, the Brooklyn Delegation of the New York City Council, 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 and the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President.

Lead scholarship support is provided by Grainger and Con Edison.

Special thanks to New York State Assembly Member Joe Lentol, the Brownsville community members who were interviewed and photographed, and all those who helped on the community painting days.

**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](http://www.groundswell.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/](http://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](http://www.pitkinbid.org)