



540 President Street, Suite 1A, Brooklyn, NY 11215 | 718.254.9782 | [www.groundswellmural.org](http://www.groundswellmural.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**December 19, 2013**

**Contact: Sharon Polli** (718) 254-9782  
[Sharon@groundswellmural.org](mailto:Sharon@groundswellmural.org)  
**Vanessa Hadox** (718) 254-9782  
[Vanessa@groundswellmural.org](mailto:Vanessa@groundswellmural.org)

## **Groundswell, the New York City Department of Probation, and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District Awarded Grant through Round Three of Governor Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Initiative**

***REDC Grant for \$50,000 to Support "Transform/Restore: Brownsville," a participatory public art project in Brownsville, Brooklyn***

**NEW YORK, NY** - Groundswell, the New York City Department of Probation, and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District announce that a \$50,000 grant from the New York State Regional Economic Development Council has been awarded to support the creation of a transformative mural project in Brownsville, Brooklyn entitled "Transform/Restore: Brownsville." Governor Andrew Cuomo recently announced that \$715.9 million has been awarded in the Regional Economic Development Council's third round of funding.

Groundswell, New York's leading non-profit organization dedicated to community public art, will partner with the New York City Department of Probation (NYC DOP) and the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) to create "Transform/Restore: Brownsville," a public art project focused on the transformation of vandalized walls into painted murals by young adults on probation.

This participatory public art project is designed to engage young adult probationers, local businesses, and community members in creating visible and permanent change in one of New York City's most challenged neighborhoods. Brownsville has the highest concentration of public housing of any neighborhood in the nation, and 1 in 12 Brownsville men between the ages of 16 to 24 are in prison.

REDC funding will leverage federal support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), awarded in July 2013 through its national Our Town initiative. Through Our Town, the NEA supports creative placemaking projects that help transform communities into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core. All Our Town grant awards were made to partnerships that consisted of at least one nonprofit organization and a local government entity.

Through this federal and state investment, Groundswell will work with young adults identified by the Department of Probation to conduct community interviews and surveys that identify Brownsville's hidden strengths, and then translate their findings into visual imagery for large-scale murals. As many

as 40 young adults on probation will complete five large-scale public art projects to be enjoyed by Brownsville's 116,000 residents.

“Groundswell is honored to be awarded a prestigious REDC award by Governor Andrew Cuomo, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Regional Council to support ‘Transform/Restore: Brownsville,’” said Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. “This grant will leverage a major federal investment and enable Groundswell to partner with the NYC Department of Probation and the Pitkin Avenue BID to provide talented youth and young probationers a highly visible platform to create permanent change within their own neighborhood. This cross-sector partnership will also provide a model for other communities to use art as a tool for personal and societal transformation.”

“The fundamental idea behind our Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON), which we launched in Brownsville two years ago, is that by connecting probation clients to a rich array of community-based opportunities and resources, we can change their lives for the better and improve public safety,” said NYC Department of Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi. “Our partnership with Groundswell and the Pitkin Avenue BID perfectly embodies that idea, and we would like to thank Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Regional Economic Development Council for their generous support. Through ‘Transform/Restore: Brownsville,’ our clients will become agents of positive change in their neighborhood and restore the vibrancy of one of Brooklyn’s historic thoroughfares.”

“The Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District is pleased to continue our collaboration with our partners Groundswell and the City of New York on this project to transform the physical landscape of Brownsville’s main commercial street,” said Pitkin Avenue BID Executive Director Daniel Murphy. “The BID’s mission is to create spaces where Brooklyn residents can feel a sense of safety, ownership, and a positive connection with their neighborhood. Having young people from our community take the lead on these transformative art projects will further our shared vision to create more beautiful, livable streets in the heart of Brownsville, a place that our residents can be truly proud of.”

The Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) initiative is a key component of Governor Cuomo’s transformative approach to State investment and economic development. The Councils are public-private partnerships composed of local experts and stakeholders from business, academia, local government, and non-governmental organizations. The Regional Councils have redefined the way New York invests in jobs and economic growth by putting in place a community-based, bottom up approach and establishing a competitive process for State resources.

New York City is an economic anchor and has long been at the forefront of the global economy. With leadership from the New York City REDC, the City is building on its world-class status through investments in key industries, such as manufacturing, tourism, and innovative technologies. In 2013, the focus of the Council’s priority projects included growing high-tech jobs and start-up activity, investing in large-scale redevelopment projects, strengthening its tourism industry, expanding housing opportunities, and improving the quality of life for New Yorkers. New York City was awarded \$57.4 million in REDC funding in Round Three. [www.regionalcouncils.ny.gov](http://www.regionalcouncils.ny.gov).

Groundswell brings together artists, youth, and community organizations to use art as a tool for social change. Our projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented in the public dialog. Groundswell is now celebrating our 17th anniversary as New York's leading organization dedicated to community public art. [www.groundswellmural.org](http://www.groundswellmural.org).

The NYC 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 liveable space within Brownsville Brooklyn's Main Street. The BID supplies supplemental sanitation services, helps maintains 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)

**Contact:**

Sharon Polli – Groundswell (718) 254-9782

Ryan Dodge – Probation (212) 361-8957

Daniel Murphy – Pitkin Ave BID (718) 922-9600

###