



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mural Unveiling at PS / IS 116 the William C. Hughley School

**Teen Artists Affirm Importance of Education
with Hope-inspiring Mural in South Jamaica**

Mural Dedication Ceremony: Wednesday, September 3 at 2pm

Location: 107-25 Wren Place, Jamaica, NY 11433

NEW YORK, NY – Groundswell, in partnership with Jamaica NeON, is pleased to announce a dedication ceremony to celebrate the unveiling of “Aspire to Inspire,” a 12’ by 115’ mural highlighting education as the most crucial step toward success in life.

This summer, Groundswell teen mural artists and young adult probation clients collaborated with Lead Artist DonChristian Jones and Assistant Artist Sofia Maldonado, through Groundswell’s paid apprenticeship the Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), to give voice to disconnected youth in South Jamaica to combat the high school dropout crisis.

Following a sequential narrative from left to right, “Aspire to Inspire” unfolds in a series of accessible and engaging visual symbols, beginning with The House of Growth on the left, moving gradually through the Learning Pool in the center, and reaching the Ocean of Opportunity at the right. With a hopscotch course presented on the left hand side, the mural highlights the affirming power of self-discovery through education, creating a sense of agency in young people and empowering them to create their own path to success.

Under the leadership of Jones and Maldonado, the youth project team re-examined the definition of education and success, conducting first-hand interviews of participants’ family, friends, and neighbors. Before getting their hands dirty with paint, participants were tasked with pitching their design concepts to the broader community, sharing the themes and artistic intention of the mural and inviting public feedback. Through this six-week participatory process, youth artists deepened their 21st Century leadership skills and developed visual literacy through hands-on artmaking workshops and field trips to museums.

“The project-creation process itself is an embodiment of the mural,” said youth participant Jasper Kerbs. “As a group, we grew from a stage of talent hibernation and gradually came to the awareness of our potential as individuals through a series of discussions and re-definition of success.”

“With this highly visible and enduring public platform, disconnected youth –who too seldom have a voice – now become central to the public dialogue about the transformational impact of education,” said NYC DOP Commissioner Ana Bermúdez. “Through our partnership with Groundswell, supported through the NeON Arts initiative, we aim to place young adult probation clients and community members on a path to graduation.”

“Groundswell’s positive youth development model, based on best practices in 21st century learning, not only catalyzes the development of skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and compassion in youth muralists, but also inspires a feeling of agency in viewers and the broader community,” said Groundswell Founder and Executive Director Amy Sananman.

Since 2006, the overall average United States graduation rate has increased from 73% to 81% as measured by 2012 Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates (AFGR) recently released by the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education. The largest gains have been achieved by Hispanic students with an improvement of 15%, from 61% in 2006 to 76% in 2012. African American graduation rates grew from 59% in 2006 to 68% in 2012.

However, urban areas with high concentrations of low-income students like South Jamaica continue to lag behind these national gains, with graduation rates in the 60% range, with some as low as 50%.

“Aspire to Inspire” is made possible with funds from NeON Arts, a program of the NYC Department of Probation in partnership with Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute. Funding to support NeON Arts is provided by the Open Society Foundations through a grant to the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City in support of the NYC Young Men’s Initiative.

Major financial support for Groundswell’s 2014 Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) is contributed by Altman Foundation, Brooklyn Nets, Catskill Watershed Corporation, Charles Lawrence Keith and Clara Miller Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, Dedalus Foundation, EILEEN FISHER, Ethel and W. George Kennedy Family Foundation, Greenpoint Community Environmental Fund, Irene B. Wolt Lifetime Trust, Lambent Foundation, M&T Bank, Pinkerton Foundation, Variety The Children’s Charity, and William Randolph Hearst Foundations, 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 Office of Public Safety, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Summer Youth Employment Program, New York City Department of Education, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Groundswell is grateful to the Office of the New York State Attorney General; Office of the Mayor of New York City; the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President; New York State Assembly Member Joseph Lentol; and New York City Council Members Brad Lander, Stephen Levin, Carlos Menchaca, and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.

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. This mural was completed as part of Groundswell's flagship program, the Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), which employs over 140 youth each summer as paid apprentices on mural projects that beautify neighborhoods and give voice to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented the public dialog. To follow a youth-driven social media campaign highlighting SLI, use #GroundswellNYC. www.groundswellmural.org

About Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) Arts

NeON Arts is a project of the NYC Department of Probation (DOP) in partnership with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute that offers young people in seven New York City communities, including those on probation, the chance to explore the arts through a variety of creative projects that help them establish positive peer relationships and develop important social and career skills. NeON Arts provides funding to New York City artists and arts organizations to produce these programs in partnership with the DOP's Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeONs), which connect local residents to opportunities, resources, and services in their neighborhoods.

The seven NeONs are in Brownsville, East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Harlem, South Jamaica, Northern Staten Island, and the South Bronx. www.carnegiehall.org/neonarts

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