# "Groundswell Community Mural Project: Nurturing the Youth of New York City"

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## Introduction

Inspired by my childhood experience with the visual arts and the scarcity of arts education in my community, this paper will delve into the relevance and importance of the arts in the lives of New York City youth. Through a particular focus on the Teen Empowerment Mural Apprenticeship (T.E.M.A.) studio program at Groundswell Community Mural Project, a community-based visual arts nonprofit organization, I will argue the significance of an arts education in low-income communities. I will also explore how community-based nonprofit organizations can aid youth in creating bright and fulfilled futures through the arts and cultural expression.

I will first highlight the nonprofit sector as it currently stands to exhibit its potential as an industry driving the American economy and why funding the arts is necessary. I will also provide evidence for the need of accessible arts programs in low-income communities by analyzing recent statistical data of arts education in New York City. I will then share Groundswell's history and impact in the five boroughs and by analyzing the organization's programming and funding, we shall see how Groundswell continues to grow and develop. Finally, I will describe the collaborative component between Groundswell and other nonprofits, individuals, and other entities to produce programming that is engaging and prosperous.

The information found in this study was made possible through various projects that I have completed in previous years about Groundswell, including interviews with youth participants, alumni participants, interns, teaching artists, and office staff that I conducted throughout the past two years. My account of my involvement in Groundswell programming during my upperclassmen years in high school and early college years will provide further details

about the expansive growth that one can experience through participation in arts programs. Online research was also critical to accumulate information relative to this study.

This case study is meant to provide further testament to the effectiveness of an arts education to stimulate personal, academic, and cultural development in today's youth and the importance of nonprofit organizations in our communities.

## What Nonprofits Offer

A devoted nonprofit organization capable of creating meaningful, long-lasting relationships with its audiences can play a significant role in the socio-political, artistic, and economic advancements of the communities that they serve and represent. The National Council of Nonprofits states:

*Nonprofits embody the best spirit and values of our nation. They help millions of individuals and families daily. They protect, feed, heal, shelter, educate, and nurture our bodies and spirits. Nonprofits also give shape to our boldest dreams, highest ideals, and noblest causes. They turn our beliefs into action - as promoters of democracy, champions of the common good, incubators of innovation, laboratories of leadership, protectors of taxpayers, responders in times of trouble, stimulators of the economy, and weavers of the community fabric.*

Nonprofit organizations continue to prove that they are more than necessary in the U.S today as we enter new socio-political environments that affect millions of people. Through their support, the needs of our nation have a greater opportunity of being met. As of 2015, over 1.56 million nonprofits were registered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), up from 1.4 million in 2012 and contributed roughly $985.4 billion to the U.S economy (Mckeever).

More specific to this case study, the Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 Study by Americans for the Arts found that the nonprofit arts and culture industry alone generated $166.3 billion in economic activity in 2015, "– $63.8 billion in spending by arts and cultural organizations and an additional $102.5 billion in event-related expenditures by their audiences." The study also found that these organizations (performing and visual arts, festivals, public art programs, arts centers and more) supported 2.3 million jobs, most of which were local hires and provided $11.9 billion in government revenue. Figure 1 (below) demonstrates the economic impact that is driven by nonprofit organizations and their audiences in the arts and culture industry.

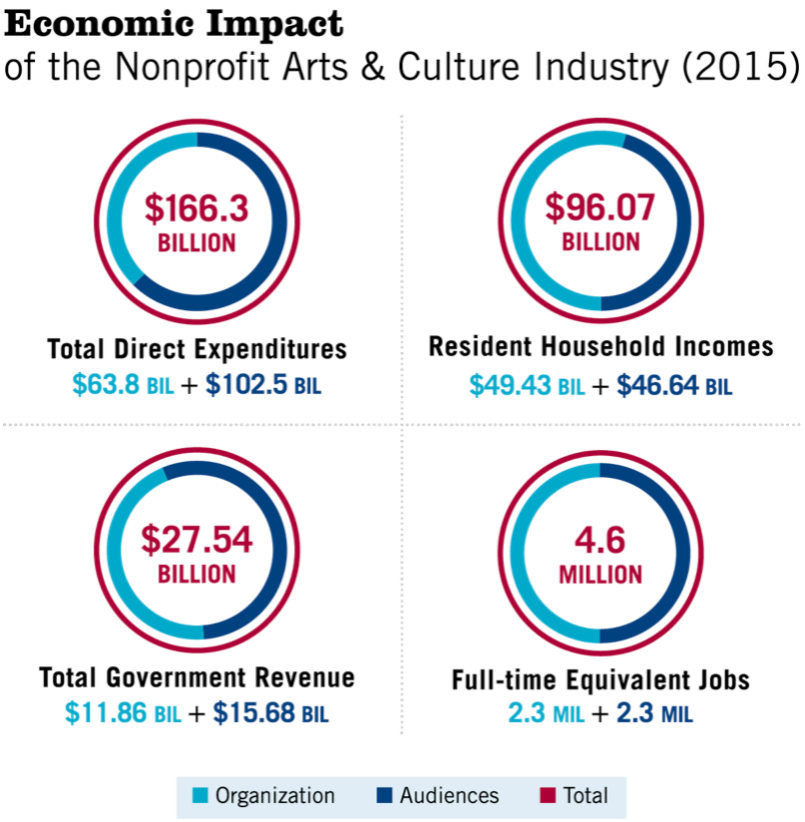


Fig. 1. *AEP5* Findings Overview. *Americans for the Arts*. 10 Dec. 2018

Right behind the retail trade and manufacturing industries, the U.S nonprofit sector holds the third largest workforce in the country with nearly 12.3 million employees as of 2016, representing 10.2% of the total private sector employment in the country ("Nonprofits Account"). Despite all this, and known by many of us, the arts continue to receive funding at a much lower rate than other government expenditures. However, there are many policymakers and arts advocates that believe in the power of the arts and work towards integrating arts in schools and communities nationwide.

***The Case for Arts Education***

In April 2014, the New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer presented "The State of the Arts: A Plan to Boost Arts Education in New York City Schools." The report analyzed whether schools in New York City employed a full-time and/or part-time certified art teacher, had formal partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, and had rooms solely dedicated for instruction in core art areas including the visual arts, music, theater, and dance. Out of 1,487 schools, the report found that 306 schools (20%) did not have a full-time or a part-time certified arts teacher. Sixteen percent of schools also did not have any arts or cultural partnerships, and ten percent of schools did not have a dedicated arts room. Additionally, the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn were found to be the most impacted communities by reductions in arts edu cation. Forty-two percent of schools in these neighborhoods lacked either a full-time or part-time certified arts teacher, and nearly half lacked both a certified arts teacher or a cultural partnership (Stringer).

Shortly after in July 2014, Mayor de Blasio, Comptroller Stringer, and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, announced $23 million in additional funding for arts education that

would support 120 new certified arts teachers, new partnerships with cultural institutions, and improve facilities in schools ("Mayor De Blasio Announces"). Most recently, the 2017-2018 Arts in Schools Report conducted by the New York City Department of Education analyzed arts education in 1,491 schools who responded from a total of 1,613. The report found that school partnership with at least one cultural organization went up from 84% in the 2013-2014 school year to 100% by 2017-2018 across the five boroughs.

Furthermore, the report found that the number of total full-time certified school-based arts teachers steadily increased from 2,393 in the 2013-2014 school year to 2,837 by 2017-2018. Schools reported a stable use of funding provided by cultural arts organizations at 36%, second to 45% from Federal, State, or City Grants in 2017-2018. The number of reported arts rooms also increased from 3,669 in 2013-2014 to 3,880 in the 2017-2018 school year. These results are a crucial representation of funding that's making a difference to provide more support for the arts in N.Y.C public schools and giving student's greater arts opportunities. "Anything that's colorful, anything that's artistic, that's how we learn. As babies, we learn from music, from visuals, and stories. Our own human development is one that should be constantly creatively sourced, and it's really a disservice to any kid that doesn't have access to that realm of thinking because it affects everything" (Anaya).

Reports and studies conducted on the relevance and importance of an arts education have yielded similar findings such as an increase in reading, writing, and math. They have also found improvements in school graduation rates and attendance from schools who provide more arts programs to their students ("10 Studies"). "An arts education experience is capable of producing significant positive impacts on academic and social development…Engaging with art is essential to the human experience. Almost as soon as motor skills are developed children communicate

through artistic expression. The arts challenge us with different points of view, compel us to empathize with "others," and give us the opportunity to reflect on the human condition" (Kisida and Bowen).

**Groundswell Community Mural Project**

Groundswell was established in Park Slope, Brooklyn in 1996 by a group of N.Y.C artists, educators, and activists under the mission of bringing youth, artists, and community organizations together to use art as a tool for social change for a more just and equitable world ("About"). The shared mindset between these individuals was that "collaborative art-making combines personal expression with the strength of community activism and produces unique and powerful outcomes." Since then Groundswell has fabricated over five-hundred murals through cooperative work with more than three-hundred community-based organizations, neighborhood groups, and local government agencies. The overall goal of the murals is to captivate and inspire community reflection, beautify spaces, and stimulate conversations. They evoke the sentiments, ideas, and culture of the youth artists' who painted them and of the communities where the murals are located ("Process").

The organization has upheld its mission for over twenty years through diverse programs that address existing or surging crucial social issues through visual art. Young artists involved learn how to harness their creativity to solve problems by thinking outside of the box. They also learn how to give and take feedback and collaborate with others (Walker). With time, their shines brighter and they begin thinking like activists to adequately address important and relevant themes such as social movements, culture, education, gender, and racial empowerment.

***Programs***

In 2017, Groundswell worked with 960 youth, 65 community partners, and 34 artists to complete 61 mural projects (Lutz & Carr). Among the T.E.M.A. program, Groundswell offers a roster of significantly effective programs that promote arts education, youth development, community empowerment, and gender identity and celebration. Each program is tailored to breathe the organization's mission into life and inspire the next generation of artists to work as activists. Youth in the public-school system often find out about Groundswell's programs through internship fairs, school faculty, Groundswell artists residencies, and from friends and family.

The Summer Leadership Institute or S.L.I was implemented into Groundswells programming in 2005 and is the organization's flagship summer jobs program. From July to August, 15-20 youth work alongside two Groundswell teaching artists to create a large-scale mural in N.Y.C. Through the three-step process of research, design, and fabrication, the murals give voice to their experiences by making critical issues visible to a greater audience. Each S.L.I mural has three public events that give the project greater visibility and enhance public support. After a profound research process, the mural teams share their concept with the community during a public design share. Partway during the fabrication process, the teams host a community painting day where they invite the local community to take part in painting the mural and engage with them through various activities. At the end of the summer, the completed murals receive a dedication ceremony and are celebrated by the project team and the local community ("Summer Leadership").

Portfolio Development is a studio program that began in 2010 and brings in 15-20 high school students with interest in pursuing the visual arts in college institutions. A teaching artist is

carefully selected to teach the two-hour program through specific criteria of having experience with youth development, having a passion for social practice, and an artist practice that aligns with the organization's mission (Hollins). The program provides the materials used by the youth artists and covers travel expenses to museums and college visits. More recently, as of 2018, Portfolio was separated into two levels; Portfolio Introduction will help youth 13-16 discover their voice and learn the fundamentals of creating a portfolio while in Advanced Portfolio, youth ages 17-19 will build a portfolio for college and scholarship admission as well as learn how to write artists statements. The program concludes with an opportunity for the young artists to present their work to visual arts school's representatives on National Portfolio Day in N.Y.C ("Portfolio Development").

Other core studio programs include Making His'tory created in 2006, an after-school spring program catered to male youth artists to "reflect on and then disrupt injustice to realize their power as leaders in their community" ("Making His'tory"). The after-school once-a-week program is held as a discussion and research-based group meeting and ends with a large-scale mural project through the Summer Leadership Institute later in the summer. Voice's Her'd was developed in 2003 to bring focus to issues that women and girls of color face. The program "gives young women a platform to tell their stories with heart and without censorship" ("Voices Her'd"). The team meets throughput the school year and after selecting a particular topic, a large-scale mural is produced through S.L.I.

Through community commissions, Groundswell collaborates with community groups, non-profit organizations, and public agencies to create a public art project using the collaborative art-making process. The project reflects the group's mission and its strategic objectives.

Every year, Groundswell partners with nearly 20 public schools throughout the five boroughs through its school-based mural residency program. Each one of the school-based programs is tailored to be flexible to meet the curriculum and classroom needs. Following the same three-step process as most of Groundswell's other programs, the groups create public artworks in their communities. Some of the special initiative projects have focused on advocating for safer streets, cultural celebration, transportation, and environmental concerns.

***Finances***

Over the past twenty years, Groundswell has been building relationships with hundreds of community partners, government agencies, and local politicians such as councilmembers to fund its projects. As of recent years, Groundswell generally works with a two-million-dollar annual budget. In Fiscal Year 2017, Groundswell received approximately 53% of its total contribution revenue from three government agencies. As of September 30, 2017, the organization's board designated  operating reserve had a balance of $432, 941. The reserve is meant for working capital and other purposes approved by the board of directors (Lutz & Carr).

Robyne Walker has been leading Groundswell as its Executive Director since 2016. She is looking towards improving individual and corporate giving and developing a sustainable business model for the organization. In order to do this, Robyne is working on evaluating and reinforcing Groundswell's board member's relationships so that there's a greater sense of their role in fundraising. New members coming onto the board are screened for their connection to resources that could benefit Groundswell. They must also have a personal alignment to the organization's work in youth, art, and social justice. Robyne stated that it is important that board members are made aware of what is expected from them so that the organization can continue servicing communities throughout New York City.

Sabrina Malik, Groundswell's Associate Director of Institutional Giving oversees and manages various sources of income for the organization. In her leadership position, she aims to strengthen "a culture of transparency between the development, programs and finance departments to further collaborative organizational strategies" (Malik).

**Down Memory Lane**

My journey into and throughout my higher education would not have been as nourishing had it not been for Groundswell. It is because of my experience there that my mentality towards social justice and community matured and why I became fascinated with the visual arts. I immigrated from Honduras to the U.S. in early 2005, so really, I didn't start my education until I was almost seven years old. I never had a kindergarten or pre-k class in Honduras, and I had very little interest in learning when I was young. Education wasn't enforced in my household either, so it made it harder for me to want to focus on schooling at that age. Despite leaving Honduras partway through the first grade (which I skipped out on regularly), I went straight into the second grade at P.S. 94 in Sunset Park.

I notice now that it in some ways it was a blessing to have been able to kick off my education in Sunset Park, a predominantly Hispanic/Latino neighborhood. It wasn't too hard to connect and identify with my classmates, and my teachers were for the most part Latino or could speak Spanish fluently. From the second grade to the beginning of middle school, I was playing a game of catch-up. I took most tests and completed my homework in Spanish for the first few years to make it to the next grade. I needed constant support, but I don't remember struggling. I would be taken out from classes into the hallways by an E.S.L. teacher who brought flashcards with her. I would practice pronunciation by looking at a picture of an object and then naming it

in English. I took three summers of summer school to be at the level of my other classmates by the time we graduated. It was such a culture shock that I could barely retain the influx of information that surrounded me and not just from school but from living in an entirely new environment.

I always loved to doodle on my notebooks and work with my hands to make something creative. In the fourth grade, after reading a picture book about Pocahontas, I drew, modeled and assembled popsicle sticks into the pilgrim's homes depicted in the book. The first time I experienced real exposure to the arts was early into middle school when I took an art class and was formally introduced to drawing and painting techniques. Besides that, I don't remember seeing another art class implemented into my schedule until the 9th grade.

My older sister introduced me to Groundswell when we were both students at Sunset Park High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. She signed up for an internship at Groundswell during her Junior year because she had an interest in visual art and knowing that I had similar interests she brought up the Portfolio Development Program which was still accepting applicants. Until that point, our high school had offered two art classes, one in painting and drawing and another in media art but I wasn't captivated by the work that we were doing. The projects we worked on were enjoyable and easy to get into and most required very little partner work. I wanted more, something catered to my interests and could be passionate about the work.

When I walked into Groundswell that first day to apply for the program, I felt invited. I stepped into the studio space and saw the fantastic art that was on display from its after-school programs. My sister showed me a colorful mural panel that she had been working on in the T.E.M.A. program regarding human trafficking. She brought up statistics and numbers relating

to the subject and how the artwork represents that information. I could tell by the way she was speaking about the issue that she was engaged in the work.


Fig. 2. "What You See is Not Who I Am." *Groundswell NYC* (12 Panels, 4x4 each), 2014.

As I looked around, the work was even more fascinating, and I knew I wanted to be a part of it. My initial hopes for the Portfolio Development Program were only to improve my drawing and painting skills. Around that time my mindset was that college was too expensive and it would be a significant financial burden on my father who also had to care for my three other siblings. After a brief interview with the Youth Development Manager discussing my personal and academic history as well as my interests, I was accepted into the program.

My artistic skills noticeably grew while in the program. Words of encouragement and critiques from my peers were vital to my increased communication and overall participation within the group. Even with time constraints, the teaching artist played a significant role in ensuring the youth that they were acknowledged. Groundswell was able to captivate my interest

in the visual arts in a way that others had not succeeded in doing. I had the opportunity to share a space with others who had an open mind and invested themselves in the work.

I stayed with Groundswell for a few more programs, and through each one I found myself reflecting on my growth. I was able to speak my mind about issues that mattered to me while also learning how to contribute to the ideas of others. One of the most significant mural projects that I worked on while I was at Groundswell was "Our American Narrative Continues" which was installed in the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration. As an immigrant myself, the six-part mural panel series holds a special place in my heart. The concept was incredibly rewarding because all of the youth had something to share. I felt empowered by having my name on a work of art in such a historic location but even more so about how far I had come working with my team.

Fig. 3. "Our American Narrative Continues." *Groundswell NYC* (10x60 ft), 2015.

College readiness workshops in the studio space were also there for me with answers to questions that I had about applications, financial aid, grants and scholarships, and loans. After completing six of Groundswell's programs and participating in the fabrication of four murals, I was sure that I would become a visual art major in college. However, doubt in my work and the applied financial pressure kept me from submitting a portfolio. Fortunately, I was accepted to SUNY Purchase College through the Educational Opportunity Program, another invaluable resource and I found Arts Management. Through the Arts Management courses that I took, I gained a more precise understanding of how Groundswell was able to operate the way that it did.

Groundswell continued to support me throughout my journey in college in more ways than I can count. From allowing me to conduct research projects during my sophomore and junior years for numerous classes and providing me with financial assistance to purchase art supplies through their Youth Artist Fund when I couldn't afford any for my studio art courses. I was continuously invited back to their space to use it for my work, artistic or academic and they kept me updated on their summer projects. It was also the first job that I ever listed on my first resume in college. When I was trying to find an academic internship, their Studio Programs manager who was a Purchase alumnus connected me with faculty at the Neuberger Museum at Purchase College and I secured a Gallery Assistant internship.

**A Shared Experience**

As I progressed through this study, I came across people who like me were impacted by Groundswell. From early July to August 2018, I observed the fabrication of a mural led by Angel Garcia, a Groundswell lead artist and three programs alumni, Sammi Chan, Lydia Aigbedion, and Gabi Balderas. Together, they created a mural in Bush Terminal Park with collaboration and

financial support from the New York City Economic Development Corporation in Sunset Park and N.Y.C. council member Carlos Menchaca. The mural focused on the diverse culture and heritage of the community and beautifully depicted a joyous neighborhood full of life and color.

Fig. 4. “Sunset Rising.” *Groundswell NYC* (15x70 ft) 2018.

Angel has been painting with Groundswell for over eleven years and has racked up quite an experience. He was sixteen years old when he signed up for S.L.I and participated in painting a mural at a public school in Sunset Park. Angel took on a few more projects with the T.E.M.A. program and was one of the first students in the Portfolio Development Program when it was still a pilot program. Through it, he completed a portfolio which led him to a degree in Illustration from the Fashion Institute of Technology (F.I.T.). As a college senior, Angel returned to Groundswell to work as an assistant artist on several mural projects and eventually became a lead artist. He now reflects on his experience as a youth artist to better his teaching techniques. "I definitely like being on the other side. Being a lead artist creating community murals that give voices to underrepresented communities and talk about issues that are important to communities

of color. It's pretty much the same mentality but what goes into a project is clearer now as a lead artist than it was as a participant. In terms of the supplies, funding, who is involved, like the community partners and all the, how all of that works. It's a little more complicated than that it first appears" (Garcia).

I first met Sammi Chan during my second run in the Portfolio Development Program in 2015. Sammi was observant and didn't speak much; she would just draw on her drawing pad. Much like Angel, she completed her portfolio, submitted it to F.I.T. and pursued Illustration. Before Groundswell, Sammi wasn't sure about pursuing a career in the visual arts, but after working on a mural through the Summer Youth Employment Program (S.Y.E.P.), she quickly found a passion for it. Initially, as a participant in Groundswell's programs, Sammi had to remind herself to speak because she was so quiet. Over time, especially throughout the research portion of the mural-making process, she became better at communicating with her peers and to the general public. Sammi mentioned that she has enjoyed the collaborative nature of the mural projects and how they bring people together. Sammi also included that while she understands the focus on Black, Brown and Latino empowerment, she would love to see Asian cultures depicted more through Groundswell's projects (Chan).

When I spoke with Lydia Aigbedion and Gabi Balderas, Lydia reflected on joining Groundswell programs early into her college experience and wishes she had the college readiness workshops to find the right college for her. She also mentioned that her teamwork, communication, and public speaking skills were strengthened through the mural projects. "I never really used to talk a lot, especially about social issues or have to do a pitch to community board leaders. It's been getting easier to talk to people about my ideas and what I want to convey to them" (Aigbedion). Gabi added that she learned how to present herself and engage audiences

to get them to respond with their feelings and ideas to the themes and visual concept of the mural (Balderas). Lydia completed Groundswell's reach over youth ages 14-21 and helps them "understand how to talk about issues going on in their community and relates to another. Even if they don't continue with Groundswell into their adulthood, they still have that emotional intelligence and speaking abilities" (Aigbedion)

**Making a Mural**

I participated in two T.E.M.A. programs when I was in high school, and they were some of the most enriching experiences of my teenage years. In my opinion, the key to truly immersing yourself into the project is by becoming part of the group. The first thing I understood from T.E.M.A. was that it is essential to learn to listen and share your thoughts. The teaching artists can only make an issue that's hard to dissect interesting if the group allows them too through questioning.

I had the opportunity to come back to Groundswell observe the T.E.M.A. program on Tuesdays from November 2018 to March 2019 to gauge the growth of some of its participants as the program matured. The team met every Tuesday from 4-7 PM for about eighteen weeks. T.E.M.A. is one of Groundswell's most outstanding mural making programs. It runs for six months and brings in youth who want to learn how to paint a mural and use art for social change. The program aligns itself with a partnering body that shares similar social justice values, and through a lengthy process of research, design, and fabrication the teaching artists and the youth fabricate a large-scale mural with a specific concept.

The Brooklyn Justice Initiatives (B.J.I.) partnered with Groundswell to create a mural focused on the themes of hero's journey, community, freedom, and restorative justice. B.J.I is

one of the operating programs at the Center for Court Innovation, a nonprofit organization that focuses its efforts on justice reform (“About”). The B.J.I program seeks to use misdemeanor arrests “as a window of opportunity to change the direction of an individual’s life and avoid unnecessary incarceration” (“Brooklyn Justice”). Quickly after the first introductory sessions, Teaching Artists Nadya Voynovskaya and Micaela Anaya set up activities to break the themes down for a better group understanding such as the Hero's Journey activity. Using colored pencils, and markers the youth created illustrated a paper wheel their personal experience with separation, trials and victories, and their return.

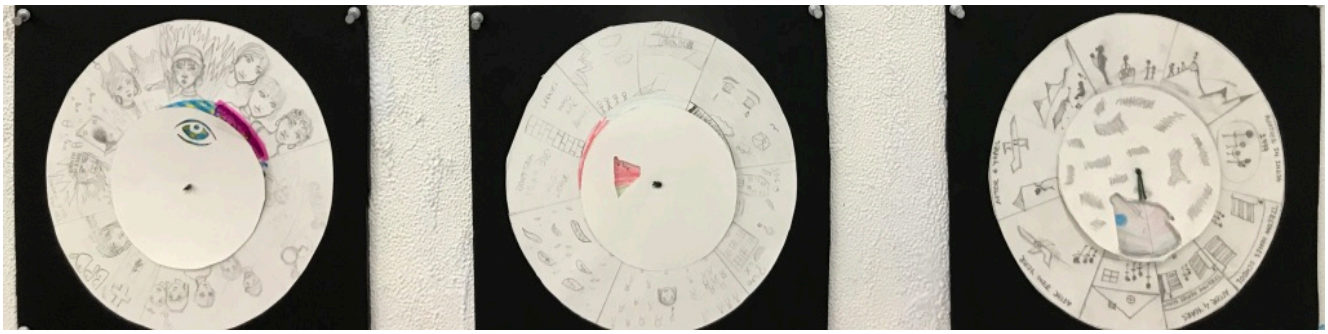

Fig. 5. Hero’s Journey Paper Wheel, T.E.M.A, Groundswell. 04 December 2018

The activity was followed by a presentation about the principles of design and color and taught the youth about composition, movement, symmetry, scale, and proportion as they apply to visual art. By this point, the group wasn't very vocal as a collective, but individually they were still willing to share when called upon by their T.A.'s and were active in the activities. Every session would begin with an icebreaker or opening group activity which usually involved stretching and letting your current mood known to the group.

I met with a few of the T.E.M.A participants during one on one interviews throughout the program. Some were new to Groundswell or to the program, and others were returners. They all had a different background but shared one thing, an interest in art. A returning participant mentioned that they were gaining a stronger sense of social justice and how using visual art can work towards solutions to everyday challenges.

As the sessions progressed, conversations grew and became more geared into the definition of freedom, community, support, and justice. Through these discussions, they came up with the symbols and imagery they wanted on the mural to best convey the themes. By mid-January, the team was ready to present the concept to B.J.I. faculty during their design share at Groundswell's studio space. Individually, the youth artists spoke about a single or group of details that they felt fortified the design and met B.J.I.'s needs. After receiving B.J.I.'s feedback, the team worked towards fabrication. The T.A.'s created a color palette and taught youth how to mix paint into large containers for use throughout the painting process. After gridding the large three panels that make up the mural, the group drew individual designs onto them that connect to one narrative.

Figure 6. BJI & Groundswell Mural Concept. T.E.M.A, Groundswell. 12 April 2019

Before it got to painting, Nadya and Micaela held quick tutorials to help the youth progress through the many sections in the mural. Micaela stated that once it got to the painting portion of the project, group members began talking more to one another as they worked intently side by side. Some would continue working on a section they were really into through breaks. Nadya commented on the development of the youth participants by saying that it's born from the process, "everybody has different opportunities to express themselves in different ways and learn new skills. Ultimately, I think the process of having a person develop their ideas, thoughts, and artistic skills and then having those things reflected on a work of art can be really satisfying" (Voynovskaya).

Fig. 7. T.E.M.A. 2018-19. *Groundswell NYC*, 19 March 2019.

Towards the culmination of the program, the youth participants had warmed up to each other and were more energetic about the work. During the programs last session, the youth were asked to share their experience and their new found knowledge about the justice system. Some stated that they learned that sometimes the justice system can be difficult for an individual to progress through and that programs like T.E.M.A and B.J.I are essential to promote justice.

Fig. 8. "Weighted Wings: The Heroes Journey to Justice." *2 of 3 panels. Groundswell NYC*, 13 April 2019.

**New Initiatives**

This past winter I was able to attend the first-ever meeting for one of Groundswell's latest projects, the Alumni Network. I caught up with a few friends from old programs as we sat and discussed a shared vision and the goals for a new collective of alumni. Some Alumni mentioned that they would like to see more internships and professional opportunities offered to them at Groundswell as well as consistent outreach. Others suggested the need to expand into the digital

art world to gather the skills for the future of visual arts. Also, there should be a stronger appreciation and consideration for other mediums besides painting and drawing as well as more workshops.

That first meeting was enough for Jamel Burgess, Studio Programs Manager to see that alumni are hungry for more of what Groundswell has to offer or can work towards providing. "Alumni, the participants who have gone through programs here, are truly the heart of the organization, and the young people who are here now will transition to be the same, the purpose of this organization" (Burgess).

Another recent initiative is the Youth Pop-Up Fair which was held earlier in February. The event was held in the organization's studio space. Sixteen booths were stationed with twenty youth artists had the opportunity to promote and sell their artwork. Jordan Martins, Groundswell's Studio Programs Coordinator, mentioned that each youth left with nearly $200 in their pockets from art sales that day. In preparation for the fair, youth were invited to workshops such as Selling Your Work 101, focusing on pricing and setting up a booth. If helping them become better artists and social activists wasn't enough, youth are learning how to price and sell their work. Being an artist is a business in itself, and all the effort and costly labor should be priced accordingly. Martins also worked closely with youth through Adulting 101 sessions to prepare them for college. The sessions covered managing college applications, financial literacy, breaking down financial packets and opening student bank accounts.

The Learning Lab powered by Spectrum opened in March and will provide youth who want to explore digital art with the tools and assistance they need. I was able to attend the launch event and raised my opinion of the opportunities the learning lab would give to youth who can't find access to the tools elsewhere.

## Conclusion

Through this study, I found that there are many benefits in having a nonprofit organization that cares about youth of color and other marginalized groups. It became clear that fostering relationships with young artists at an early age is the first step to helping them take the inner workings of their communities into account. Without the work that Groundswell does, many communities in N.Y.C. would not be able to enjoy the enriching process of creating artwork that represents what matters most to them. Groundswell demonstrates continuous initiative in assisting communities who want to provide arts for their youth in schools and their surrounding spaces. They provide rich programming that promotes self-growth. The collaborative process exists all around us and learning how to harness it can help us accomplish our goals.

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