



September 17-21, 2018
GREEN RIBBON WEEK
Promoting positive mental health for youth

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Marley Dias and the GrassROOTS Community Foundation SuperGirls launch,
Green Ribbon Week:
A Public Health Initiative Aimed at Promoting Positive Mental Health for Youth
September 17-21, 2018**

New Jersey, September 18, 2018- The lack of conversation and stigma around mental health can act as barriers for those needing and seeking treatment or services. GrassROOTS Community Foundation (GrassROOTS), a training institution devoted to public health and social justice, is seeking to eliminate these barriers with its second annual Green Ribbon Week social action campaign. The goal of Green Ribbon Week is to promote positive mental health for youth by encouraging healthy behaviors that can prevent and/or reduce risk factors for mental disorders. For the week of September 17th through 21st, over 80,000 youth, adults and allies in New Jersey will unite to promote positive mental health for youth. Throughout the week, partners will pause for one minute to listen and take a breath as a show of solidarity for youth. Research shows that breathing can help reduce anxiety by increasing blood flow. On September 18th all partners will join together in solidarity. They will wear green as a symbol of support.

According to the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention, over 500,000 kids each year report to the hospital because of a self-harm injury. Even more alarming, suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24 (Center For Disease Control, 2015). The impact of impaired mental health extends beyond self-harm. Children who have high depression do not perform well in school, have higher rates of suspension, and often fail to do well on homework because of their inability to concentrate (National Center for Mental Health Checkups, 2015). Young people with social anxiety are twice as likely to not finish high school (National Center for Mental Health Checkups, 2015). Among youth, girls are at higher risk for mental health disorders. Girls 14-18 years of age have higher rates of depression than boys of similar age and the effects continue into adulthood. Women experience depression at twice the rate of men (National Survey of Drug Use and Health, 2014; National Institute of Mental Health, 1999).

Much of the national attention on youth mental health has come after local or national incidents involving school shootings. For GrassROOTS, responding after a crisis is not sufficient, and is therefore taking preventative measures. “Our mission is to create a world where all girls grow up to be healthy women. We hope Green Ribbon Week will become a national call to action. We want mental health to be treated

in the same way as we treat physical health. Prevention is the best medicine,” says Dr. Johnson Dias, President & Founder of GrassROOTS Community Foundation.

This campaign is spearheaded by three of GrassROOTS’ SuperGirls: Amina Anekwe, Tori Fergus and Marley Dias, Founder of the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign. Together these girls are advocating for organizations, adults and students to listen to youth voices. They are also encouraging youth to breathe and talk through any problems they are facing. The girls selected September because “September is hard for kids. Some kids are starting new schools. Some are planning to leave school and it’s a lot of pressure”, says Marley Dias. “We want kids to know that they can get through it.”

Several partners have adopted and supported the program including the City of Plainfield, is the first municipality to sign on and support this effort; RWJBarnabas Health, where the girls and their counterparts first conceived and presented the idea during their Healthcare Fellowship; West Orange High School, where Marley and Amina attend high school; Central High School and Speedway Academies in Newark, New Jersey, which has partnered with GrassROOTS for various community programs. TD Bank has also donated stress balls to this effort.

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About GrassROOTS Community Foundation:

GrassROOTS Community Foundation (GCF) is a training organization with an emphasis on public health and social action. We invest in our community members’ collective well-being, and teach them how to use their healthy energy to transform themselves, their families and communities. We support, develop and tailor wellness programs for women and girls, particularly those who grew up in economic distress. We also advocate for policies and practices that reduce racial and gender disparities and foster equity. For more information visit:

<https://grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/>

About GrassROOTS Community Foundation and RWJBarnabas Health Care Fellows Program:

In 2017 GrassROOTS collaborated with New Jersey’s largest integrated healthcare system, RWJBarnabas, to develop the Healthcare Fellows Program, a pipeline of black girl leaders in healthcare. The fellowship extends beyond the traditional STEM framework to teach girls about the business, policy, implementation and operation of a healthcare system. The fellowship sought to introduce these adolescent girls to careers in healthcare administration as an upstream method of addressing the lack of equity in representation of this demographic and the need to grow it in order to address the growing rate of health disparities. SuperGirls, as they are called, received over 40 hours of training in public health including classes taught by college professors and hospital rotations. For their Capstone project SuperGirls were asked to identify a key issue that was not discussed during their fellowship. The result is their mental health and social action initiative: #GreenRibbonWeek.