

**Legal Name**

Yard Inc

**Project Title**

The BANG GROUP Ensemble (DAVID PARKER, Artistic Director & JEFFREY KAZIN, Co-Director) at THE YARD, exploring new approaches to building demand for contemporary dance, including components of tap/percussive dance, musical theater, and applied media

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013242

**Project Progress and Successes**

It is appropriate to begin with statements from the Co-Directors of The Bang Group, the Residency Ensemble which spent over 30 days onsite, in whole or in part, over the DDCF/MAKING IT project period:

DAVID PARKER: 'Making It' is the most innovative educational program for young people in which I've taken part. Its basis is solving problems in space and time through embodiment of ideas and tasks provided by the teachers. It is this choreographic sensibility that makes it unique and gives us access to all students, male and female, trained and untrained. Dance training is a part of "Making It" but not its beginning. We start with the notion that all of us can already work with our bodies in space and time, using movements we know or can generate in the moment. The essential creative nature of dance comes first and that itself builds demand for training. Our students began creating dances, or movement events, from the very first day. As they dove into the creative process, solving problems, laying out ideas and expressing themselves, they gained skills and developed a hunger for more. I have taught dance composition for many years at The Juilliard School and Barnard College and I have students with years of training who have never made their own work. "Making It" reverses that and, in so doing, shows students that the ability to create and express through movement lives in all of us right now."

JEFFREY KAZIN: "The BANG Group entered the "Making It" process as a means -- among other things -- to expose young minds to the processes by which we develop our work. To show and share that choreographic problem solving is not only akin to problem solving in any discipline but may offer pathways into discoveries not necessarily associated with dance. We were rewarded in unimaginable ways. As performing artists we are equally lauded and hindered by our habits. To witness young minds tackle some of the same problems we have given ourselves was inspiring, daunting, exciting and revelatory. To witness students with no prior experience engage so fully and with such a lack of ego was exhilarating. Teachers and administrators expressed to us that because students were unknown to us and we to them, the students were allowed and, in fact, encouraged to make decisions, lead, follow, and collaborate in ways they had not previously. Learning not only how to make creative decisions but to make them as part of a team can only prove beneficial as these students continue through the educational system and then into the "real world."

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At the outset of planning for MAKING IT, The Yard's dance-making and applied movement initiative in early 2014, The Yard/Bang Group team established the premise that the island school system, including its ancillary Charter School and homeschooler group offshoots, was the most important social portal through which to bring the intergenerational rural island population to dance. The propitious starting gate in March 2014 was a Yard-hosted PowerPoint dinner for the system's superintendent, all school principals, save one (off-island due to family circumstances), and the system's Special Services (Special Needs) administrator. Led by initiative director Jesse Keller, The Yard's Director of Island Programs and Education; Deborah Damast, the project curriculum specialist, director of the summer KIDS DO DANCE! on The Yard campus, and Master Teacher in Dance Education at NYU/Steinhart; and David Parker and Jeffrey Kazin, Director's of The Bang Group, the presentation spoke to the cross-disciplinary possibilities of introducing dance at all K-12 schools. More to the point, we proposed tailoring the application of movement, both in its physical and conceptual components to individual needs as articulated by each school or selected classroom. in this "demonstration year" (our characterization to our partners of the DDCF project period), The Yard tested 1-4 week residencies in partner schools and constituencies, including The Bridge program for autistic and other intellectually disabled learners, as well as opportunistic single-day workshops. Examples of areas of interest in which artists have worked include: Physical Education, where both principal and gym teachers in the high school were looking to revamp old-school Phys Ed; Renaissance studies; and African studies.

This work extended to the sole YMCA on Martha's Vineyard, which early on had asked The Yard to bring dance to its program mix throughout the year. The YMCA program has come to include public showings at both the high school theater and The Yard's black box theater at the end of each semester. In 2015, The Yard will add the Farm Institute, a "learning farm" now operated by the Massachusetts Trustees of Reservations. And, The Yard's own on-site summer program, MAKING IT: Kids DO Dance! will expand from 4 to 5 weeks in 2015, based on the sold out term in summer of 2014. A final note on the children side of MAKING IT: The Chilmark Town Hall approached the Yard earlier this year to ask if we would mount an after-school program for kids whose parents were working, offering their Community Cultural Center gratis (25 kids showed up the first day). This was a definitive cusp in our relationship to our immediate community, with The Yard now seen as a significant and responsive provider of community services on demand - that happen to be dance-related. The not-so-secret success of MAKING IT lies in the parents' universally enthusiastic reaction and re-enrollment for subsequent activities in multiple of The Yard's 'Making It offerings'. If they hadn't been our audience before, many became so after the fact, because of the dedication and care the artists who run the initiative have, and continue to, put forth. Our documentation illustrates that. Another telling moment came recently when, after having set up a dance workshop at the Tisbury School, that school's Health Officer approached The Yard about developing a well-being program for the entire school - that proposal is currently under consideration for 2015-2016.

The 2014-2015 school year produced (and continues to produce at this filing) exciting artist residencies and teaching opportunities by artists ranging from The Bang Group to Godfrey Muwulya (a remarkable Ugandan dancer and drummer) to Leo Manzari, one of the Manzari Brothers (tap proteges of Maurice Hinds), to Case Closed, the hip-hop offshoot of Providence Rhode Island's EVERETT led by Cambodian-American Sokeo Ros, as well as The Yard's internal artist ensemble, DanceTheYard. MAKING IT received significant coverage in the island press throughout the project period with feature articles, interviews and photo

documentation. In the spring of 2014, Women Empowered named MAKING IT Director Jesse Keller a "Woman of the Year" for her dedicated work with children across the island via The Yard. Jesse is the youngest recipient ever in the award's history.

The 2014 YARD ARTS season was a centerpiece of the DDCF project period, with myriad artist residencies and performances, community classes and public participation events on and off The Yard campus. By design, most artists involved in MAKING IT are featured in the summer season (The Bang Group has been a resident company since 2011), creating and performing, thereby connecting back or ahead to the ideas and skills they bring to their off-season roles in the initiative. The Yard historically has sometimes been perceived as a seasonal operation - that's not true, of course, but certainly its most prominent warm-weather activities gave that impression. The current Yard theater and studio are not winterized, meaning that on-site artistic work has to happen elsewhere on the Vineyard during the off-season. The Yard is now in a funded planning and schematic design process, and hopes to renovate and upgrade the campus and facilities, including full winterization, in the next couple of years. In the meantime, MAKING IT makes visible the case for a truly "Year-Round Yard," an inclusive identity that will be built out in the capital campus renovation and upgrade now in the schematic design phase. A further convergence of MAKING IT and The Yard's artist residency and presentation programs will be the introduction in 2015-2016 of THE WINTER YARD, an off-site program featuring The Bang Group's "Nut/Cracked," and Quebec's renegade free-skate dance troupe, Le Patin Libre, among others. Artists in the series will simultaneously be sited in the schools (not to mention the figure skating club and ubiquitous hockey teams).

Meanwhile, MAKING IT also moved out into the adult geography of the Vineyard, first through its packed, inexpensive summertime June-September "community classes," open to all ages and levels of experience (note that The Yard does NOT operate a formal school a la Pillow or ADF). With Naomi Goldberg Haas of New York's Dances for a Variable Population, The Yard has set up MAKING IT partnerships with the Tisbury Senior Center, the Edgartown Senior Center, and Windemere-the MV Hospital nursing home. The Yard has nurtured a collaboration with an island-grown group of generally older community movers, WHAT'S WRITTEN WITHIN, who gather year-round to improvise together in a photographer's dance studio in Edgartown, and who DanceTheYard invites in for joint performances during the summer and winter seasons. WWW includes, among others, an 89-year old psychiatrist, a dancing nurse, a martial artist, twin high-school juniors boys, and a boat builder currently building a historic scow by hand. Other adult dance-driven relationships now thrive with such diverse organizations as Featherstone Center for the Arts (Oak Bluffs), the Mytoi Japanese Gardens (Trustees of Reservations, Chappaquiddick) and the Chappy Community Center (also Chappaquiddick). In addition, The Yard has taken up seats on the Fishermen's Preservation Trust board and the Steering Committee of the Vineyard's Healthy Aging Task Force, and 'Arts MV', the all-island arts coalition - on a small rural island, these related involvements are essential to the acceptance of the citizenship of dance in the civic mix - and the key to building the larger curiosity, participation, and demand that creates a multi-dimensional "appetite" for dance, consumed in concert, in the classroom, in health and welfare, and in personal experiences as adult or child.

The success of this early "planning/demonstration" period is equally apparent in the resources that have come to MAKING IT during the DDCF project period - a remarkable statement of the leveraging power of both the initial grant as well as of the artist/organization teamwork & partnership that MAKING IT creates and embodies. The Tower Foundation (Buffalo-based but with individual connections to Chilmark and the Vineyard) appeared out of the blue, over-matching the original DDCF award. Other grants have come from the Ford Foundation (travel costs for artists that will extend beyond the

end of the DDCF grant period); the Permanent Endowment of Martha's Vineyard; Martha's Vineyard Savings Bank; Pathways Project Institute; Farm Neck Foundation (supporting technology costs associated with the project).

Though still early in its development, MAKING IT is a committed and clearly welcomed effort, building an intergenerational community and conversation around dance. The Yard is starting up a relationship with the 92nd Street Y and Jody Arnhold's Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) program there to advance some of the educational underpinnings of MAKING IT. But The Yard team firmly believes that dance is an accessible shared language that anyone can speak, through which anyone can move and, in moving, replace mystery with whetted appetite. The appetite for dance is a complex construct in the public mind, connecting the earliest innate childhood instincts to dance with abandon with the empirical but sometimes distant beauty of the occasional concert performance, with the personal participation through classes or other movement experiences, with the family experience over time of kids in the classroom and recitals with up close and personal experiences of dance-making in local landscapes, day in and day out, and with words about dance, about its making, about its application to daily life, showing up in casual conversation. Appetite is active demand, pure and simple.

In that regard, audiences grew substantially for The Yard's seasonal YARD ARTS artist presentations in 2014, at both The Yard's 100-seat Patricia Nanon Theater and at the 700-seat Performing Arts Center at the regional high school in Oak Bluffs. Greater numbers, greater diversity, and greater acclaim for the programming, ranging from The Bang Group to Paul Taylor 2 to Camille Brown to Aparna Ramaswamy, among others. The Yard's periodic and popular DANCEHALL (Public Dancing Allowed!) community dances with live music featuring talents ranging from island favorite sons, Johnny Hoy and the Bluefish, to DJ Rekha, from the Basement Bhangra region of Brooklyn - and including the PRIDE, NOT PREJUDICE celebration tea dance (the 10th anniversary of same-sex marriage's debut in Massachusetts, and the first such LGBTQ event ever on the Vineyard) - also benefited from the rich concentration of attention around dance that MAKING IT is generating, while pulling in ever more diverse participation.

In sum, MAKING IT has experienced a robust ramp-up during the DDCF-supported planning and demonstration phase. It has stimulated an island-wide intergenerational and familial public involvement in a variety of dance and dance-related activities. Dance - in its artistry, to be sure, but equally important in its educational and social applications infusing everyday life - is becoming an increasingly familiar neighbor in this mostly rural and geographically isolated region. And there is no question that MAKING IT has brought general public attention to dance, and has given a legitimacy to the small micro-community of dance artists who create, teach and mentor within this artisanal field (as in Mom-and-Pop fisheries or farms) - a potent model for stimulating performing arts viability in rural communities. Audiences are growing rapidly, and diversifying (cf. the Yard's ongoing live dance & film partnership with the MV African American Film Festival, which featured Camille Brown's "Mr. TOL.E.RAnCE " opening the festival in 2014, as will Ronald K Brown/Evidence in 2015). The Yard, The Bang Group artist leadership and the MAKING IT program partners are eager to move the initiative forward in 2015-2016, and are already responding to current participant and organizational partner survey recommendations, as well as new requests from the community for targeted dance development and learning opportunities. One major conclusion for core implementation in 2015-2016: In general, artists/companies in MAKING IT will work in extended residencies of 3-5 weeks. Familiarity, participation and appetite, in this case for dance, all result from a sustained time-based experience in place. That will be MAKING IT's focus going forward.

When he arrived at The Yard in early 2011, David White stated, "If The Yard is going to be successful again, it will have to be owned by the Vineyard's year-round population." That population is roughly 17,000, many under a general financial stress, which is then both swamped and sustained in 2 summer months when over 100,000 descend on the island. The MAKING IT initiative is directed at that core year-round group who are the engine of the island. It has become increasingly clear that they are embracing The Yard, MAKING IT and its generous artists. That is perhaps the most gratifying success of all.

NOTE: Video and photo documentation was extensive, with Nic Petry of the BANG Group overseeing much of the effort, including mentoring of media artists. The Yard upgraded its capabilities with the purchase an HD-caliber camera.

### **Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

The main challenge for MAKING IT is one common to outsiders dealing with school systems: Even in a situation as relatively open as the surprisingly welcoming one on Martha's Vineyard - where the superintendent's office and the principals have become enthusiastic supporters - communication and consensus are not assured throughout institutions. As the achievements indicated earlier show, we have had a good deal of success right out of the box in a number of schools, but there remain teachers who use the pressure of Common Core testing (the bane of arts curricula) and the limitations of class time to push back against innovation. This is, of course, a challenge present in many schools/school systems around the country, and the good news is that the positive stories that pass from teacher to teacher about MAKING IT bring more inquiries to The Yard than we can currently fulfill (but are working to fulfill in the future with careful expansion and capacity building for the program). Rote school schedules and actual working space for dance can also be an issue, although we have had quite a bit of assistance from our schools. As a result we are paying particular attention to individual classrooms and to select teachers who are both curious and eager to pioneer using dance within their contexts.

Even given that the DDCF project period was a demonstration year for MAKING IT, and resources were being built up at the same time that the program was being put in place, we found that we need artists to be on island for greater periods than we originally anticipated. Familiarity and potential longterm continuity with resident artists is time-based. The longer we keep artists in the community, the more resonant and indelible their contribution and their citizenship. Mere presentation in most places doesn't come close. So the challenge for the Yard, as we approach 2015-2016, is to be able to support artists on-site, in schools and elsewhere, for 3 to 5 week residency periods year-round. In an island community like the Vineyard, which is defined by being generally bypassed by the cultural traffic of the mainland (especially in the 10 months of the off-season), this is a crucial objective in order to maintain the constancy and utility of dance on the island.

MAKING IT clearly has a lot of moving parts, complex scheduling, and a variety of partners spread across the Vineyard. One of the things we are trying to better shape for public consumption and local funders (largely small and volunteer in nature) is the narrative of the initiative. Some years back, for a community presentation on Art and Sustainability, Artistic Director David R. White set himself the task to translate the mission of The Yard into a language of sustainability encompassing non-arts interests - farming, fishing, love of land, and the like. The result was this: "Seed. Grow. Reap. Repeat: The nature of the artist." And so, in the continuing translation of MAKING IT, we still have to answer such questions as, "How does dance connect with the fishing and farming constituencies? How does dance contribute to the sustainability of the community? How can dance artists stand

shoulder to shoulder with fellow year-round workers?"

There is the challenge presented by MAKING IT's preliminary successes. As Jesse Keller stated to me recently, "We did in fact 'build demand,' and build a lot of it, and now we need to build our team to handle it." The Yard is small by design, with 4 very efficient full-time staff, augmented for production during the summer season, and by MAKING IT's resident artists throughout the year. But positive response to the initiative means an additional demand to ramp up project management internally, sometimes in order to mobilize multiple projects at certain crunch times of the year. So the Yard will have to develop additional administrative capacity as the initiative grows up.

A last point involves technology, documentation and evaluation: Even though The Yard devoted a good deal of attention to quality photo and high-end documentation, we still feel there's much more to do to truly embed technological tools into the processes of MAKING IT. This will be a priority in the next phase of implementation in 2015-2016. As for formal evaluation, it is the opinion of the Residency artists and the Yard staff, we are not at the point of critical mass where an outside evaluation makes sense. We have a good deal of empirical feedback from all of MAKING IT's participants, including initial surveys from teachers & students, but this has been, as noted elsewhere, a demonstration period, tailoring, testing and gauging participation in dance on the Vineyard with a variety of constituencies and contexts. While we are certainly drawing conclusions from all of these efforts, and while plans are in place to substantively ramp up the initiative in 2015-2016, we have seen the success of this planning phase of anchoring MAKING IT for the longterm with projects that converge into a single civic conversation around dance and its real-world applications. It is anticipated that a formal evaluation will be put in place as an integral part of the 2015-2016 implementation phase.

### **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

"Building Demand" is labor-intensive, no matter where you work (hence the inevitable chasing of additional capacity within organizations). It requires majority effort beyond the walls of an office; it entails one-to-one cultivation of individual attention and dialogue. It involves creating an "appetite" in a complete person, rather than developing a thing called an audience member - the former is individual and specific, blood and flesh and unknown personal context; the latter is an avatar in an attempt to shape a herd behavior. Provoking public participation in dance means having multiple approaches to the individual - intergenerational classes, workshops, neighborhood pop-ups, parades (DanceTheYard dancers are among the most popular elements of the island's 4th of July parade) all bring an individual closer to the field. In a rural community, you have no choice but to push out to the end of every dirt road (we have a lot of them out here), travel the town meetings, embed in the schools and the YMCA and town community centers in order to discover who lives here, and whether they might speak dance with you, in some form or another. Only as a byproduct of that effort do you begin to see core audience members emerge, one after the next. Know thy community. Know people by their first names, as many as you can. Take school chiefs, YMCA executives and others out to dinner on your dime (that's where all of this rooted for MAKING IT, as indicated above). Use local rituals familiar to all. It's almost incomprehensible in an urban center, but a norm of rural living. This foot-leather approach (and thinking) is inevitably successful as it breeds a resonant word of mouth, the conversation that actually becomes a dance by any other name.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

www.dancetheyard.org (click on 'Making It' and all subsequent Making It tabbed programs for)

<http://www.dancetheyard.org/media-room/>

1. "Charter Students Learn Dance as a Unifying Language," MV Gazette 2/23/15  
<http://vineyardgazette.com/news/2015/02/23/charter-students-learn-dance-unifying-language?k=vg544812e3a1cc8>

2. "Sounds of Uganda and Rwanda transport Charter School students," MV Times 2/25/15  
<http://www.mvtimes.com/2015/02/25/sounds-uganda-rwanda-transport-charter-school-students/>

3. "Women of the Year: Moving and Shaking the Island Forward," MV Times 9/10/14 (Making It Director Jesse Keller receives award for program/teaching work - Youngest recipient EVER) <http://www.mvtimes.com/2014/09/10/women-year-moving-shaking-island-foward/>

4. "The Making of Making It," MV Times 8/27/14  
<http://www.mvtimes.com/2014/08/27/making-making/>

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

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