

Read the small print

Container has been supported in the UK by
JP Fruits Distributors
DA2
Arts Council of England
Mongrel
The Jamaican High Commission
The Metropolitan Black Police Association
Access-IT

SkyBuilders in the USA

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In Jamaica the project is supported by
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The first anniversary celebration event in London is supported by Arts Council, London through Media Art Projects Ltd

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Q: When is a container not a container?

A: When it thinks outside the box.

Launched in April 2003 in Palmers Cross, Clarendon, Jamaica, The **Container Project** has been providing the local community with access to all aspects of computing and media production ever since.

As its name suggests, the IT facility is housed inside a specially converted freight container. With 15 workstations and staffed mostly by volunteers, it gives local people the chance to gain new skills and explore creativity through music, video and multimedia production.

In its first year, the non-profit project has provided more than 200 participants access to computers and helped 60 others to graduate with certificates in IT awarded by Jamaica's national training agency, HEART-NTA (Human Employment and Resource Training)/NCTVET (National Council of Technical Vocational Education and Training).



However, it is much more than a multimedia centre. Yes, the **Container Project** offers IT advice, technical support, and training for further education and employment. But it is also a place for the community to experiment with new media, working with local and international collaborators and artists to use technology for their own purposes, whether as an artist's brush, a mouthpiece, a power tool, or a global meeting place.

The **Container** is also a metaphor. On its outward journey, it takes bananas and other domestic produce from the Caribbean to the developed world. Now it is being used to "repatriate" technology into these islands, bridging both the economic and the digital divide. Irony and fascination rolled into one.

the container before departure



About Mongrel

Mongrel is a mixed bunch of people, machines and intelligence working to celebrate the methods of Street Culture (mongrelSTREET). We make socially engaged culture, which sometimes means making art, sometimes software, sometimes setting up workshops, or helping other mongrels to set things up. "Mongrel makes art about ourselves or about the life and thinking of people we meet. Sometimes we do this in order to think and feel better for ourselves. Sometimes we are creating a space for others to inhabit that thinking and feeling (the **Container Project** is one such space)."

We enjoy working on a wide range of activities, individually or as a collective. This can be with organisations, or other Mongrels. The ability to plug into different cultures, skills, structures or ways of doing things means our art gets to stay fresh.



George Wilson, the initiator of this latest endeavour is from Freetown. He currently lives in the UK and has visited the **Container** in Jamaica. He has observed similarities between the two countries, especially the large numbers of young people with talent, but little prospect of employment. Although large numbers of the population are struggling to obtain the minimum necessities, George is convinced of the value of the **Container Project** and its potential power. In Sierra Leone, all education and training is expensive and therefore inaccessible to the vast majority of the population. The **Container**, therefore, would be a unique resource, offering the possibility for self-development and advancement to people who would otherwise have few opportunities. George and the **Container** team are expecting to work hard and have few illusions about the many barriers that are likely to come in their way. But experience and enthusiasm is on their side and they can be assured of many helpers on site in Freetown, just as a team has come together in Palmers Cross to make the vision a reality.

There is also a plan to build a mobile container project here in the UK, and to develop a media arts exchange program facilitated by London Arts.



In the beginning ...

The story of the **Container** opens with mervin Jarman. Born in Palmers Cross, Jamaica – a place disliked and disregarded by the upper class, where unemployment was the order of the day, with no industry, no infrastructure, no wages, no economy, a dead zone populated by heroes called Buba, Natty, Bull, Bukie, Sandokan, Pope Paul and Dawg Heart to name just a few. And somewhere in the midst of this was mervin. mervin was dismissed by his ninth grade teacher, who told him he would end up on the sidewalk smoking ganja “just like the rest of them”.



merv Jarman

“My nickname in school was Monster,” he says. “All the other kids were terrified of me, friend or foe, as you only had to smile at the wrong time for me to deliver a whopping. At the same time, I was an avid defender of the underdog... It was scary back then and eventually I graduated to a more subtle posture.”

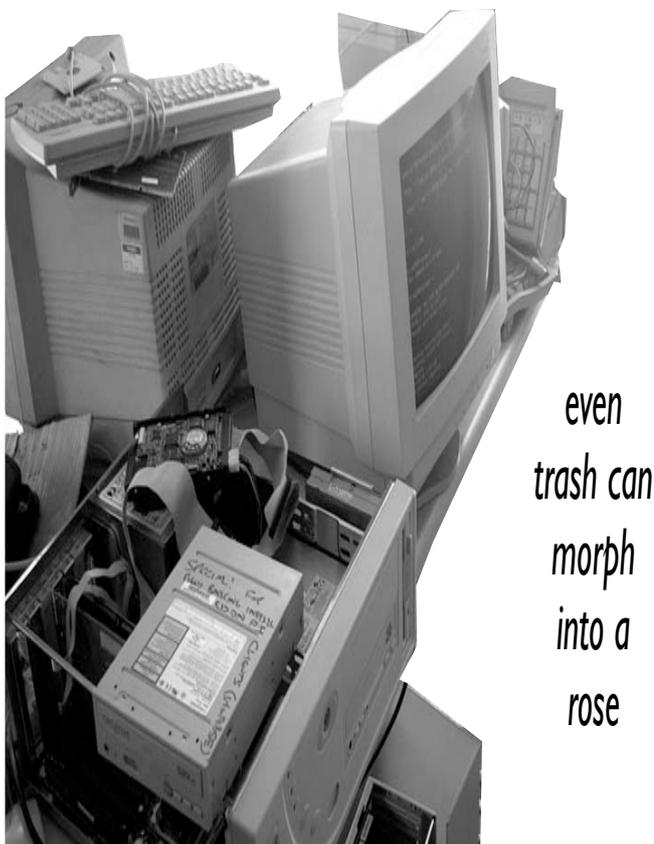
Written off by everyone but his friends as worthless and fit only for dumping, mervin knew that, given the right circumstances, even trash can morph into a rose.

After moving to London and training in multimedia, he joined avant-garde digital arts group “Mongrel” and transformed all he had learned in the street into media arts culture. At 41 and a community art activist, interactive multimedia designer, and street art-hactivist, he has keynoted at Brown University, conducted

workshops at UCLA, showcased at MOCA and other international galleries, including the Tate in London, the Power House in Brisbane, and the Banff Media Centre in Alberta, Canada.

Determined to return to Palmers Cross to share everything he has learnt back in his hometown, mervin spent four long years planning and raising support for the **Container Project**.

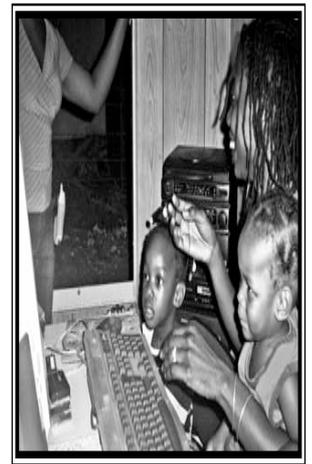
“It is a common saying in Jamaica that ‘life is one big road with a lot of signs’. The **Container** is a signpost on the digital horizon of community arts initiatives. The digital media arts community in the UK has a lot to be proud of, it also has a lot more potential than it gives itself or gets credit for. This is one of the reasons why I feel so strongly about continuous collaboration between the UK and Jamaica. There is so much synergy, and the potential to grow and develop new prodigies, new areas of art and media genre is so huge that it would be criminal to just let it slip, and inhumane to keep it all to myself.”



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Eyes forward

In a little under a year, the 40ft ISO freight container has become a Palmers Cross institution. While it offers computer access and training to all-comers, its main target audience is that large cohort of under-educated, under-employed young men and women who need new opportunities and new hope through self-discovery and practical, marketable skills.



“My vision is to see more projects like this one popping up all over the place where it is not intimidating to access and the community feels that they are a part of the whole operation,” says David Stewart, one of the local facilitators in the **Container**.

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“You only have to look around to see the impact that the container has made, as nuff (several) of the youths would have been hanging out on the street corner and being chased by police. Also, it has helped to ease a lot of tensions as mervin insists that this should be a neutral space where everyone is treated equally and without malice so lots of the guys now talk to each other, whereas before it was not like that.”

Later in 2004, a core group of volunteers from Jamaica and the UK will travel to Sierra Leone, to prepare a similar project in the capital, Freetown.

after-school program for the national GSAT (Grade Six Achievement Test) programme for 12 year olds.

The membership stakeholder concept, where a member becomes a part owner of the project, ensures good social etiquette and a platform for responsible behaviour and a positive attitude to the training.



There are no prejudicial entry requirements for participation in this project. So people come from all walks of life, educational background and ages.

Participants work at their own pace through self-taught interactive multimedia training mediums, reinforced by patient tutors who work with students on an individual basis.



The **Container** now boasts more than 210 members and partnership with the Jamaican HEART-NTA to provide at least 60 people a year with vocational qualifications.

The project has created employment and a pool of skilled employees.

It has improved the literacy and numeracy levels of all the participants and fostered new attitudes to work and the community.

Betwixt and between ...

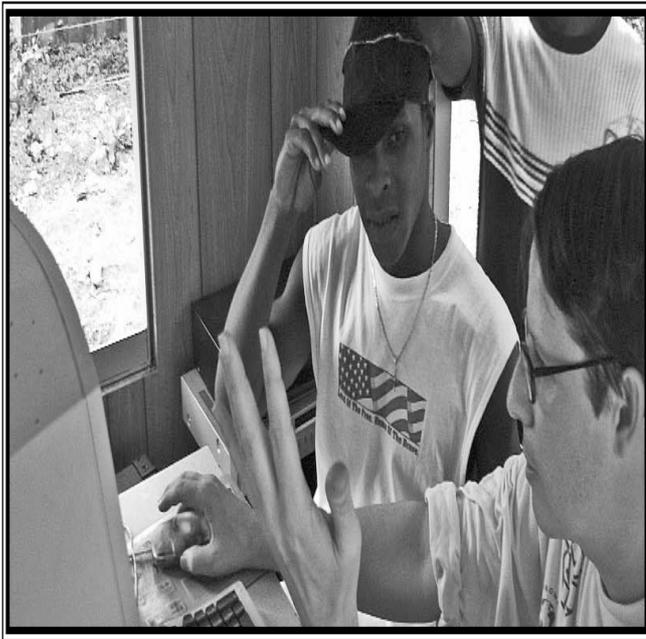


The beauty of the **Container Project** is that it exists at both a physical and conceptual level and invites benefactors and beneficiaries alike to enter a technological world of digital mysticism, a magical world of art and storytelling, through software specific creations like mongrelSoft Linker, colour separation, and other mongrelised notions of technology.

Indeed, the workstations themselves are built out of trash technology – for the most part, old and discarded technology collected by mervin, his friends and colleagues (the benefactors), and anchored into the **Container** for the community at large (the beneficiaries).

By creating a completely new kind of social interactive space, the **Container** has helped to link diaspora migrant communities to their roots.

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“During the Windrush years,” explains mervin, “many of us in the Caribbean left our homes to go out and fend with the outside world, with the distinct intention of one day returning home with our bounty, to improve the lifestyle of our families and friends. Well, on April 30, 2003, this all came flooding into Palmers Cross. The **Container** had returned not to take but to give, so that all could be enlightened and empowered.”



Stat attack



In its first 12 months in the south central Jamaica town of Palmers Cross, the project has successfully trained more than 200 people, and 61 people were forwarded for examinations. Those 61 people included: 24 males; 36 females; a range of ages from 17 to 35; 15 employed and 45 unemployed workers.

The multi-media teaching programme includes an introduction to basic and intermediary computer applications and manipulation of both software and hardware.

There has also been a high demand for related training, especially in the areas of basic computing such as keyboard skills, and office based applications such as MS Word, MS Excel, Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing, Paint Shop and PhotoShop.

The project has had success providing ICT skills to candidates preparing to enter tertiary institutions, and developed an