Moving in the Spirit

2025-2026

ANNUAL REPORT



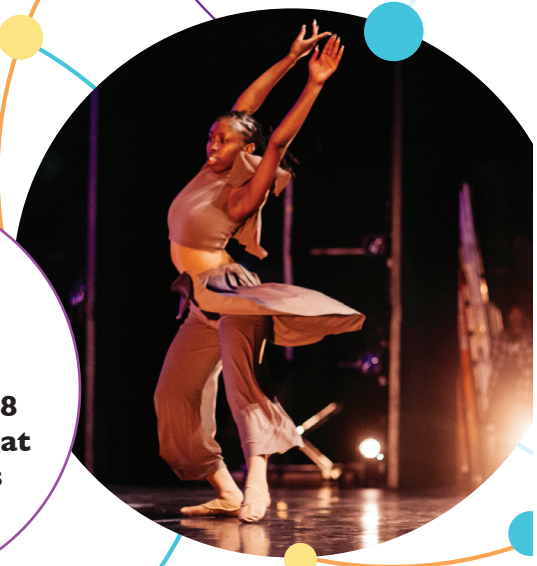
Mission

Moving in the Spirit is a creative youth development organization. We use the discipline of dance to help young people develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills they need to thrive.

Numbers that Dance



314
students ages 3-18 served onsite and at community sites



172
volunteers donated their time and talent

49%
of onsite students utilized sliding-scale tuition

1,203
additional patrons served through workshops, performances, and community classes



Letter from the Executive Director & Board President

Dear Moving in the Spirit Community,

I've admired Moving in the Spirit for more than twenty years, and I never imagined leading it until the opportunity was in front of me. I first encountered this organization from the other side of the table, as a funder. What I remember most is watching young people build the kind of confidence and discipline that changes how a person moves through the rest of their life, and a staff that treated every child's growth as sacred work.

That belief is what drew me here in March 2026, and it's the same belief Henry has carried through his years on our board.

Moving in the Spirit is a youth development organization. Our founders discovered decades ago that dance created an immediate, powerful connection with young people, breaking down barriers and opening doors that little else could. That's still true today. The qualities we ask our students to build – resilience, adaptability, the willingness to keep going when the choreography isn't working – are the same ones this organization had to draw on this year.

FY26 was genuinely difficult. Our staffing looked different by the end of the year than it did at the start, and our finances took a real hit: unaudited results show a significant deficit. The fundraising environment was part of it, and so was the timing of some grants we expected to land. We also took on real one-time costs this year tied to our leadership transition and strategic planning process. We are not the only nonprofit navigating a year like this one. But context doesn't soften it.

What the year taught us matters more than any single number. We reforecasted our budget, drew strategically on reserves to maintain program continuity, and protected what matters most: **every class ran, and every student kept receiving the support they rely on.** We leaned on each other – staff, board, volunteers, parents, donors – when the ground shifted. Adaptability isn't a slogan here. It's practice.

We also closed a milestone years in the making, one worth pausing on. **The facility our community worked so hard to build through the *A Space to Soar* capital campaign is fully paid for and ours.** It took years of vision and generosity from leaders and donors who believed in this home long before it existed. We are deeply grateful.

Through all of it, our students continued to learn and grow.

Philanthropic support allowed us to offer sliding-scale tuition to 49% of our onsite students this year. Evaluation results confirmed that our students kept growing in technique and in the focus, self-regulation, and confidence it takes to keep showing up when things are hard.

We also spent time this year listening to alumni, parents, longtime supporters, staff, and board about what makes Moving in the Spirit matter and reflecting on how we reach young people who can't get to our facility. That listening has informed a new three-year strategic plan built around four priorities: making the most of the building we now own, strengthening our programming, building the organizational capacity and diversified funding to sustain the work, and deepening our ties to the people who make it possible. We look forward to sharing more as the plan takes shape.

Now, we step into our 40th year carrying what this year taught us, with a permanent home, a clearer direction for our future, and four decades of experience showing us what is possible when young people are given a place to grow, create, and belong.

We can't do it alone. If you've been part of our community, thank you, and please consider a monthly gift to carry us into our 40th year. If you're new to Moving in the Spirit, there's no better year to join us.

With gratitude,

Lita Ugarte Pardi
Executive Director

Henry A. Kelly
Board President



A Year in Motion

Highlights from the Program Year

Moving in the Spirit marked a leadership transition this year, expressing our gratitude to Shalondra Henry for her years of service and welcoming Lita Ugarte Pardi as Executive Director in March 2026. Lita brings more than 25 years of nonprofit and philanthropic leadership experience to Moving in the Spirit.





Moving in the Spirit's program team and guest presenters delivered youth development workshops every other month to teen and pre-teen students focused on communications skills, personal development, and career preparation.



In February 2026, Moving in the Spirit training company students attended the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference, where they experienced professional performances, attended master classes, networked, and auditioned for summer intensive and college scholarship opportunities.



On March 20 & 21, 2026, GLOW in Motion and Apprentice Corporation dancers performed *Home is Where the Heart Is*, a powerful performance exploring home, displacement, and the experiences of people facing homelessness.



On May 7, 2026, 200 students ages 5-18 blended dance and multimedia storytelling in *Press Play*, a new work presented at the Rialto Center for the Arts.



Graduating seniors Autumne Robey and Mery Simmons received a collective $100,000 in college scholarships!



A Home of Our Own

This year, Moving in the Spirit reached a milestone years in the making: we officially took full ownership of our 21,500-square-foot arts and youth development center at the Edgewood/ Candler Park MARTA station.

Created through a visionary partnership with MARTA, Columbia Ventures, Perkins & Will, and Invest Atlanta, the facility was designed as a place where young people can learn, create, lead, and belong – and where Atlanta's broader arts community can grow alongside them.

Among the organizations that utilize our center is Giwayen Mata, an all-sistah dance, percussion, and vocal ensemble that rehearses and teaches in the building. Company director and Moving in the Spirit teaching artist Tambra Omiyale Harris describes the center as an artistic home where organizations like hers can grow while young people experience an intergenerational creative community.

"It is not just the walls," Tambra says. "It is the care in every aspect of this space that matters to artists like me."

The center also helps sustain our work: rental income from artists, organizations, and community groups brought in more than $116,000 this year. Full ownership ensures that this home, built around young people, artists, and community, will remain part of Moving in the Spirit's legacy for generations to come.



Finding Her Footing

After a traumatic brain injury, longtime dancer Marissa Rosemond finds strength in the community that has grown up alongside her.

Marissa Rosemond has been dancing at Moving in the Spirit since she was six years old. By fourteen, she'd found her place in the company's most advanced ensemble, with a particular gift for improvisation. "That's what I'm most praised about," she says. But dance has always meant more to her than skill. "It's my outlet for anything in life," she explains. "They say dance is like letting out all your emotions through movement, and that's how it is for me."

This past year, that outlet was nearly taken from her. A blow to the head during a gym class volleyball game left Marissa with a traumatic brain injury and symptoms that persisted for months. Headaches. Memory lapses. Words she'd always had, suddenly out of reach. Her mother, Masonia Traylor, remembers those months as some of the hardest of her life – more than ten specialists, a four-day hospital stay, and a daughter who was normally so well-spoken now struggling to find words. "It's been very, very, very scary to experience these last couple of months," Masonia says.

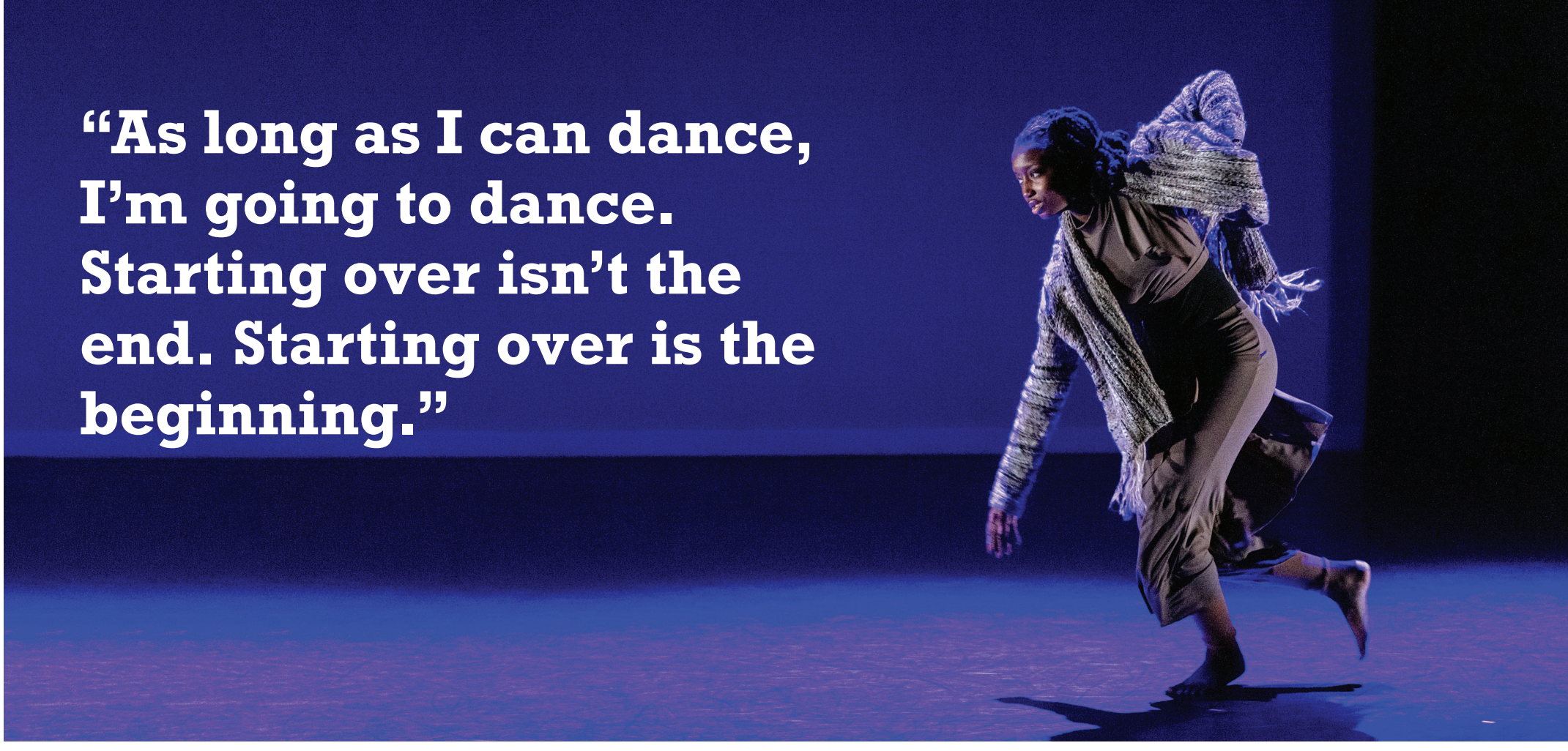
Marissa was in the middle of preparing a featured role in Moving in the Spirit's spring performance when her symptoms first appeared. Her teaching artists and fellow dancers adapted around her, sometimes week to week, sometimes day to day. They also knew when to ask her to slow down. Marissa remembers begging to remain in dances she wasn't physically ready for, only to be reminded that she had to take care of her body, her health, and her "full embodiment." At the same time, no one treated stepping back from a dance as stepping away from the community. "Each time something different came up, Moving in the Spirit just made the adjustment," Masonia says.

Staff didn't ask Marissa to stay away. Instead, they asked Masonia a different question: "How do you want to have Marissa show up? We miss her." On the days dancing wasn't possible, Marissa found other ways to stay part of the work, including helping backstage with the younger dancers. "They didn't just say, 'Okay, you're sick, stay over there,'" Masonia recalls.

Teaching artist Tambra Omiyale Harris, who has taught Marissa's West African dance classes for several years, sees moments like this as an extension of what makes Moving in the Spirit different in the first place. "Many studios that are geared toward youth don't necessarily focus on the development of the inside of the youth, but more so their technical skills," she says.



Young Marissa.



“As long as I can dance, I’m going to dance. Starting over isn’t the end. Starting over is the beginning.”

Here, technique is only part of the curriculum. Tambra describes the program as “helping students become smarter and shine brighter from the inside.”

Marissa understands that intuitively. “I feel like I get life lessons through dance, but I don’t know how to say that through words because I say them through dancing.” She points to patience, “communication skills, and not doubting yourself so often” as invaluable skills she’s gained.

Masonia watched those qualities carry her daughter through recovery. “Moving in the Spirit has grounded her in her bounce back,” she says. “We just experienced a traumatic brain injury, and she has the confidence to know that her body remembers. Her body can still do great things.” When Marissa was cleared to return to dance, she described the feeling simply: “When I got back, it felt like home.” Recovery wasn’t a straight line. Some days were better than others, but her resolve held. “As long as I can dance, I’m going to dance,” she says. “Starting over isn’t the end. Starting over is the beginning.”

Even her sense of humor stayed intact. Asked what might stop her from dancing again, Marissa didn’t hesitate: “I don’t care if there’s an asteroid. I’m going to hit the nae-nae.”

Marissa’s story is uniquely her own. But the community that surrounded her – the teachers who adapted, the peers who welcomed her back, the space that still felt like home – is something generations of young people have found at Moving in the Spirit for 40 years: a place to grow, a community to belong to, and, when they face a difficult season, somewhere to land.

In the Spotlight



Carter, age 7 | Mini Steps

"I love dancing because I get to learn new moves and make new friends. When you first come to class, you don't know everybody. But then you get to know them, and you can ask them to be your friend. If someone is all alone, we ask them if they want to play.

This year, our class made a dance about home. It was challenging to remember all the moves, so I watched my classmates and practiced at home. We helped each other when someone forgot what to do. I kept practicing, and I got better and better. It made me feel like I had a big family in my heart.

I feel more confident because I know I can learn moves I didn't think I could do."

Students grew in interpersonal skills, including communication, collaboration, empathy, and inclusion.*

* *Based on pre- and post-program assessments conducted as part of Moving in the Spirit's 2025–26 independent evaluation by RISE Research & Evaluation. Students were assessed on a four-point scale across five developmental domains, with growth documented across all five.*



"I keep coming back to Moving in the Spirit because it's fun! I like dancing, my friends and my teacher, Mr. Twix. He teaches us cool dances. First, we practice the steps a few times, and then he turns on the music. When we're learning something hard, he helps us.

I like hanging out with my classmates, too. We trade Pokémon cards and share snacks after class.

This year, we performed at the Rialto. Backstage, it was dark, but there was glowing tape so we could see. When our teacher told us to stop, we stopped and stood by the wall. Everybody was a little shy at first, but when we went onstage, everyone's shyness just went away! I felt good after performing.

I feel more confident now because I know the moves better. I like learning new dances, especially when they're more challenging. And I get to perform in the big May performance, where we get flowers at the end!"

Students made their greatest gains in class and stage etiquette – arriving ready to learn, following rehearsal routines, and understanding how to conduct themselves backstage and onstage.*

Landon, age 8 | Boys in Motion



"I've been dancing at Moving in the Spirit for eight years. I started in Mini Steps, then moved up to Girls in Motion and GLOW in Motion, and this year I made it into Apprentice Corporation. Moving in the Spirit is like a second family to me. It's helped me come out of my shell, build my confidence and learn more about who I am and who I want to become.

I've learned to express myself through dance by putting my emotions into my choreography and not overthinking. I used to worry about making a mistake or messing up the choreography. I'm still working on not overthinking, but I've learned that making mistakes is okay. You can't let them push you down or stop you from going after your goals.

When we create together, we listen to the music and our teachers, but we also put our own creativity, energy and "sparkle" into the dance. It feels like it's my own dance, even though I didn't make it by myself. I can put my emotions into the movement and express things through dance that might be hard for me to say in words.

When I walk onto a stage now, I feel like, "I can do this. I got this."

Creativity and performance quality was our second-largest area of growth.*

Kamaya, age 15 | Apprentice Corporation



Room to Move, Room to Be

Dance at Boyce Ansley School

Before the dancing begins, Chris "Twix" Shepard wants to hear how his students are doing.

Sometimes, the check-in takes longer than he planned. "They really enjoy the check-in," he says. "Sometimes it can take a lot of our time because they just have so much to say."

At The Boyce L. Ansley School, a tuition-free private school in Atlanta for children who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, that simple practice helps lay the foundation for something bigger than dance.

For three years, Twix, a Moving in the Spirit teaching artist, has brought dance-based youth development to Ansley students, teaching many students across all three years. His approach combines hip-hop, cultural history, and practice in communication and problem-solving.

Head of School Ray James recognized the difference early. As the school refined its community partnerships, Moving in the Spirit stood out for its consistency and ability to connect with students. "Kids don't learn from people they don't like," Ray says. "Twix was able to build a quick rapport with kids, hold them accountable, teach them fun and movement-based activities in a way that was safe."

That trust makes room for students to bring their whole selves to class. Students know they can bring him a bad day, and Twix notices when a child who gave him a hug last week suddenly seems distant.

The result, Twix says, is confidence. Students who once sat outside the dance circle now step in to show off their moves. "That's progress," he says. Children whose instinct was to yell or push back when upset are "learning different options for how to deal with issues that happen in class or outside of class."

Ray sees movement as a complement to the school's in-house therapy. "Not every kid wants to talk about their problems," he says. "Some kids just need to actually move."

For Twix, it comes down to permission. "Giving them permission to be kids, essentially, letting them do the motions, make mistakes, and then we talk about it."

Students also have something to look forward to. In a spring survey, they ranked Moving in the Spirit among the programs they most wanted to keep.

For both organizations, the partnership reflects a shared belief that education extends beyond academics. Community partners create opportunities for students to discover new ways to express themselves and recognize what they can achieve.

And through a trusted teaching artist who returns week after week, they gain something just as important: a caring adult who sees their potential.



Moving in the Spirit

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LaMia Dingle | Artistic Director

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Azaria Gadson | Operations & Volunteer Coordinator

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Armoni Moody | Educational Development Manager

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Chris Shepard | Program Associate

Tosin Taiwo | Rental Manager

Spencer Lee Tegner | Program Associate

Chelsea Vill Thompson | Program Manager

Matt Wynalda | Grants Manager

TEACHING ARTISTS

Zoë Azille, Aubria Battle, Deborah Chambers, Azaria Gadson, Maimouna Jhamicia Hale, Tambra Omiyale Harris, Versaille Jones, Nia Lancelin, Janan Mirza, Armoni Moody, Graham Shelor, Chris "Twix" Shepard, Chelsea Vill Thompson



Financial Statement

For the year ending June 30, 2026

This year brought significant financial challenges for Moving in the Spirit, amid a difficult fundraising environment for nonprofits nationwide. During this period, our financial reserves provided an important source of stability, helping us navigate a challenging year while continuing to serve young people and our community.

Even amid these financial pressures, we remained committed to making our programs accessible to families across Atlanta. This year, 49% of our students participated through sliding-scale tuition, helping ensure that a family's financial circumstances did not stand in the way of a young person's opportunity to dance, grow, and belong.

As we look ahead, we are taking steps to strengthen our financial position and long-term sustainability so that Moving in the Spirit can continue providing accessible, high-quality youth development programs for generations to come.



INCOME

Public Support and Revenue		
Contributions		$1,123,246.54
Government Grants		55,000.00
Performance and Teaching Fees		138,145.22
Rental Income		116,576.60
Special Events		29,259.84
	Total	**$1,462,228.20**
Plus Interest and Dividends		38,390.03
Plus Miscellaneous Income		588.76

TOTAL INCOME

$1,501,206.99

EXPENSES

Program Services		$1,273,008.76
Management and General		520,708.25
Fundraising		324,772.65
	Total	**$2,118,489.66**
Plus non-cash Deferred Rent Expense		$40,875.00

TOTAL EXPENSES

$2,159,364.66

NET DEFICIT $658,157.67

These numbers are unaudited and subject to change. An independent audit is in progress.

LEGACY CIRCLE

Legacy Circle is our planned giving society. These donors have added Moving in the Spirit as a beneficiary by will, trust, or endowment gifts. Their generosity and foresight ensure our sustainability well into the future.

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To learn more about the Legacy Circle and planned giving options, please contact Selena Harper, Senior Director of Advancement, at (470) 737-1030 or selena@movinginthespirit.org

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The GT Render Family Foundation
Invesco Holding Co
Samsung Electronics America
Warner Bros. Discovery

$500-$999
Alaska Airlines
Long Real Estate Developers, LLC
Preferred School Care

$1-$499
AMB Group, LLC
Dell Technologies
Dunwoody Woman's Club Inc.
EBS Property Investments, LLC
Formhouse
Franklin Templeton
Indigo Wellness
Intuitive Surgical
The Kroger Company
Microsoft
Paper Luxe Studios
social capital/Jersey Mike's
Thermo Fisher Scientific
Truist Financial Corporation
Matching Gift Program
Usley Woods Kids Feeding Kids Foundation

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