



i am a girl

six girls coming of age, ready to become something extraordinary

TESTIFY MEDIA PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH DOCUMENTARY AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION, PLAN AUSTRALIA, INTREPID TRAVEL, WOMEN'S PLANS FOUNDATION, THYNE REID FOUNDATION, WEIRANDERSON FOUNDATION AND DELUXE 'I AM A GIRL' STAFFING: BREANI, KIMSEY, AZIZA, HABIBA, KATIE AND MANU. MUSIC: JOHN GRAY. FILM EDITOR: LINDI HARRISON. COP: NICOLA DALEY. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: MITZI GOLDMAN. PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY: REBECCA BARRY.

FUNDED BY

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A STUDY GUIDE BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>



The documentary runs for **53 minutes**. There is also an 88 minute version which has been shown in cinemas. Also available for teachers are 6 video vignettes of each individual girl's story. These are available for viewing and classroom use under the EDUCATION tab at <<http://www.iamagirl.com.au>>.

Overview

I Am a Girl (Rebecca Barry, 2013) is a documentary that paints a picture of the reality of what it means to be a girl in the twenty-first century. Feminism may have promised equality and sought a better and fairer world for women, but the reality is that girls make up almost a quarter of the world's population, yet still face the greatest discrimination of any group on the planet. Technology and science offer unimaginable potential but we still struggle to ensure men and women are afforded equal opportunities. In spite of these obstacles, girls have found extraordinary ways to persevere and in this documentary we hear their stories of strength, hope, courage and a refusal to be second-best.

The journey takes the audience through a pastiche of diverse cultures and societies around the globe, including Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, Afghanistan, the USA and Australia.

Synopsis

As a day on earth transpires from dawn to dusk and into the night, we meet Manu, Kimsey, Aziza, Habiba, Breani and Katie – each on the brink of womanhood and dealing with the realities of what it means to grow up female in their world today. As they come of age in the way their culture dictates, we see remarkable, heartwarming stories of resilience, bravery and humour.

Stylistically the documentary is poetic and observational, capturing the day-to-day realities of being a girl. The interwoven narratives use the motifs of landscapes and 'coming-of-age' events, whether that is graduating from school, motherhood or an early marriage.

The opening narration makes this simple and damning statement about what it means to be born a girl in the world today:

There is a group of people in the world today who are more persecuted than anyone else, but they are not political or religious activists. They are girls. Being born a girl means you are more likely to be subjected to violence, disease, poverty and disadvantage than any other group on the planet. As each girl moves closer to coming of age, I Am a Girl reveals what it means to grow up female in the twenty-first century.

Curriculum Guidelines

I Am a Girl would be suitable for middle and senior secondary students. However, teachers should preview the film before showing it to middle school students as there are several quite explicit scenes showing aspects of these young women's lives, including the reality of suffering a depressive illness, childbirth and descriptions of sexual exploitation. The film has been classified as M (recommended

for Mature audiences – <<http://www.classification.gov.au/Industry/Journey/Pages/Resources/CLS%20-%20Cinema%20Managers%20Factsheet%20-%20December%2012%20update.pdf>>

The program is relevant to Health and Physical Education subjects, Values Education, Civics and Citizenship, Cross-cultural and Gender Studies, English, Personal Development, Psychology and Media Studies.

In several of these subject areas, students are encouraged to develop their knowledge of local and global values and beliefs and consider the idea of values as social constructs and principles. *I Am a Girl* could also be used as a text for students of English studying themes of identity, belonging and growing up, particularly as these ideas are reflected in a number of different societies. For Media Studies students the film offers a model of observational documentary making that is both intimate and moving without ever seeming intrusive or mawkish.

Some Australian girls may believe they are not disadvantaged in relation to their male counterparts; and compared to the lives of girls in countries such as Afghanistan and many third-world Asian and African countries, most Australian girls today do have many more opportunities to excel in areas traditionally dominated by their male counterparts.

Senior-secondary exam results such as VCE and HSC increasingly show that girls in Australia are outperforming boys in many study areas. However, inequalities that are less easy to measure accurately still exist in Australia for girls and women, such as lower pay rates and fewer opportunities for promotion, including becoming CEO of a company or principal of a school. Students may like to discuss why this is still the case in a country like Australia.

Girls still need to be quite thick-skinned and resilient to weather the storms of growing up female. Their confidence and belief in their own worth will continue to be tested if they deviate from social and parental expectations in relation to widely held views about



gender roles. The space between being regarded as a slut or a nerd is a difficult area to traverse.

This documentary shows that throughout the world, many girls still struggle to be regarded as individuals with a right to education and freedom from sexual exploitation and coercion into early marriages.

Malala Yousafzai, the high-profile Pakistani girl who refused to be silenced and fought for the rights of girls to an education, could not be silenced by the Taliban despite the attempt on her life in 2012. She has become a powerful symbol for girls all over the world.

Background Information

We live in a world where 100 million girls are missing due to female gendercide*, a world where 62 million girls of primary school age are out of school and where 20–50 per cent of girls have experienced abuse from a family member. Three quarters of the world's HIV sufferers aged under twenty-five are women, and girls under twenty represent 50 per cent of sexual assaults throughout the world.

Feminism may have promised equality and sought a better world for women but the reality is that girls face the greatest discrimination of any group in the world. The film explores patterns of inequality and canvasses the attitudes of the girls' mothers, fathers and community. *I Am a Girl* paints a clear picture of the reality of what it means to be a girl in the twenty-first century, a world where technology and science offer unimagined potential but where we are still struggling to ensure boys and girls are afforded the same opportunities.

We learn about the plight of girls in both developing and developed countries and the profound and disturbing discrimination that pervades today. And yet, in spite of obstacles girls around the world face, they tell a story of strength, hope, courage and a strong will to survive.





See more at <<http://www.iamagirl.com.au>>.

Students need only reflect on the massive gender imbalance in both Federal and State parliaments in Australia to realise how far we have to go before female voices are heard as loudly as those of males: The Abbott cabinet has one woman out of nineteen members (5 per cent), and there are only five women in the Abbott ministry (17 per cent).

The composition of the Australian parliament, though, doesn't look dissimilar to parliaments in places we'd regard as alike in culture and democratic systems. Take the US: only ninety-eight of the 535 seats in Congress are held by women (18 per cent), a record high for American politics. This compares with 25 per cent women in Australia's House of Representatives in the last (forty-third) parliament and 37 per cent women in the Senate, numbers which are almost identical to those in the forty-first parliament, in which John Howard was Prime Minister.

In the UK, 22 per cent of parliamentarians are women and 19 per cent of the ministry are women.¹

The connection between a family's economic situation and their children's education affects how far most girls will proceed in education. It remains more difficult for girls to complete education in many countries as they are seen to be less important than boys in ensuring the family's prosperity. Their role and value is often seen principally as child-bearer, mother and wife.

*Gendercide is the deliberate aborting, abandoning or killing of female babies in some countries where males are preferred as offspring.

Pre-viewing questions

Talking about some of these questions is likely to be more interesting and productive in small groups of males and females (where this is possible).

1. What is the essential physiological difference between males and females?
2. In what decade of the twentieth century do you think reliable birth control (the contraceptive pill) became widely available to women in many first world countries like Australia?
3. Do you think female and male children are brought up differently in Australia today? If so, in what ways?
4. Should they be reared with different expectations, both their own and those of their parents?
5. If you have lived in other countries, do parents bring up their male and female children differently there? What expectations do they have of their male and female children?
6. Are you aware of any countries in the world where male children are valued more highly than female children, or perhaps the other way around?
7. Describe how young women are generally presented in the popular media.
8. Name three female role models whose style/appearance/presentation and/or achievements you admire.
9. Describe how young men are presented in western media.
10. Name three male role models whose style/appearance/presentation and/or achievements you admire.
11. Do you believe males and females in Australia today are subjected to similar pressures to look and behave in a particular way? How pervasive is the role of the media in setting styles and fashions?
12. Do you think friends or family have the most influence on young women in our society?
13. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of co-education for girls and for boys?
14. Is it the case that being born male or female has no effect on what you can aspire to be and/or achieve?
15. Do females need to be smarter or better looking and more hardworking than their male counterparts to reach their goals?
16. What do you think are the best things about being a girl (or boy) today in Australia?

Watching the film

The experience of each of these girls growing up is very different and the place they are at aged 17+ is largely dependent on where they live and on their family and society's expectations. However, all the girls have dreams, whatever their life experiences.

See following page for info about the girls.



AZIZA (AFGHANISTAN)

Aziza highly values her education – something she wishes for all Afghan girls. She wants to study law at university and dreams of becoming the first female president of her country.



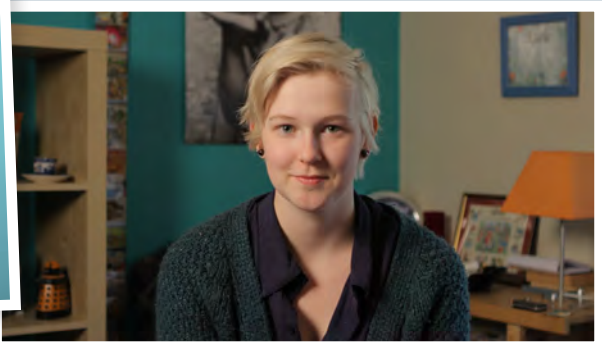
BREANI (USA)

Her dream is to become the 'Princess of Pop-Rap' – will Breani be able to escape the 'black hole' of the Projects and find success?



HABIBA (CAMEROON)

Habiba is marrying for love, but ponders all that she is giving up for her new life. What will it be like leaving behind her friends and family?



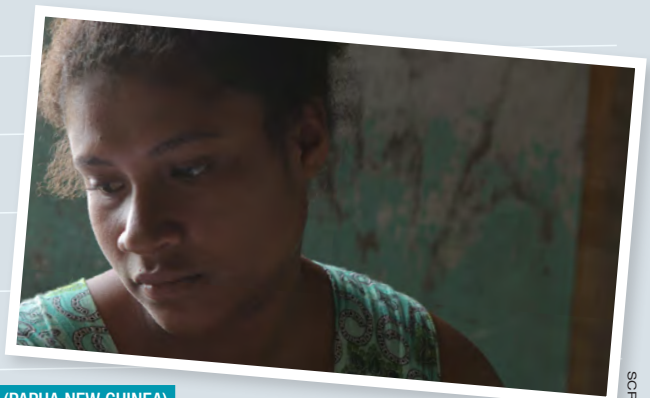
KATIE (AUSTRALIA)

Intelligent and from a strong middle-class family, Katie has everything she wants and needs, yet suffers from depression. How will she cope with the stress of her final exams and her first forays into love?



KIMSEY (CAMBODIA)

Kimsey has been a sex-worker and the provider for her family since she was twelve. All she wants is for her child to be educated, so that she won't have to follow in her mother's footsteps.

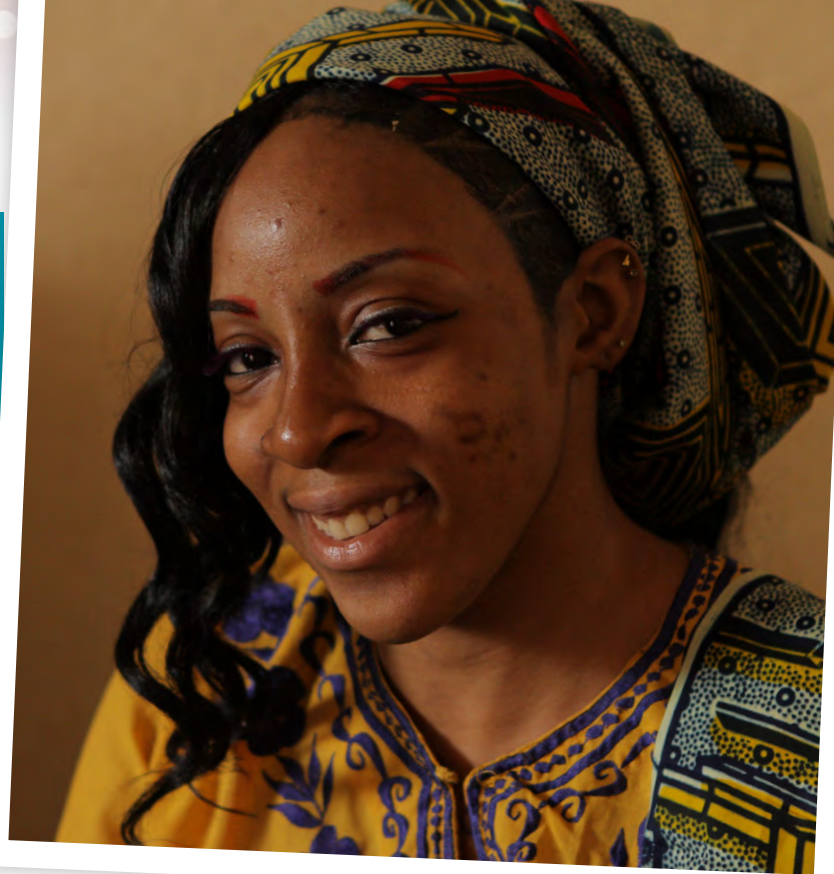


MANU (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)

In the final stages of her pregnancy, nineteen-year-old Manu must face the consequences of her decision to have her baby, despite the reservations of her family.

Education can significantly boost annual economic growth in low-income countries. An educated girl is more likely to have fewer children, keep them healthy and educated and earn a better income to help lift her family out of poverty. In some countries such as Cambodia a donation of \$69 can provide education for a child for a year.

Gail Kelly – Westpac CEO



STUDENT ACTIVITY 1

Use the Viewing Chart (Table 1) on the following page to record your impressions of each of the girls featured in this film. As the film moves between the six girls, it may be best to divide your class into three groups with each group of students focussing on two of the girls, e.g. Group 1 might focus on Breani and Kimsey, Group 2 on Katie and Habiba and Group 3 on Aziza and Manu.

Example:

Name	Breani
Age	Seventeen
Place where she lives	United States of America, Brooklyn, New York, 'The Projects', public housing apartment

STUDENT ACTIVITY 2

Does It Matter Where You Are Born?

A. The lottery of life

Using a search engine, research the prevailing economic, political, cultural/religious situation in one of these countries — Cambodia, Cameroon, Afghanistan or Papua New Guinea. Consider who



has provided the information about the country (e.g. one entry about Cameroon describes it as being 'about the same size as Oregon', which is probably not very useful unless you are American). Generally you will find the Wikipedia and Lonely Planet entries quite well-organised, current and informative.

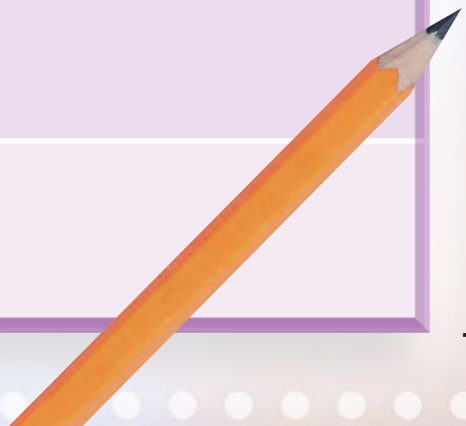
- Create a background report about the country that includes information about education levels, access to health services, political stability, religions practised and living conditions. Note any aspects of the country's history and geography that may provide clues to language, politics and religion.
- Two of the six girls featured were born in first-world countries — USA and Australia. Compare and contrast their lives as shown in the documentary with those of the other four girls.
- Imagine you are part of a one-month student exchange program to the country you have researched — Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia or Afghanistan. What do you think you would find most interesting and most confronting about living for a month in a society very different to your own? How do you think your counterpart would cope in Australia?

B. A room of one's own

This is an observational documentary, which means that the people filming and recording the subjects of the film shared personal spaces as well as some of the day-to-day interactions and intimate moments with these girls, e.g. the birth of a child, revelations about depression, and sometimes tense moments with a partner etc. But where are many of these moments filmed?

Table 1 - Viewing Chart

Name	
Age	
Place where she lives	
Immediate family	
Friends	
Education level	
Boyfriend/Partner	
Hobbies and interests	
Internet access	
Dreams and hopes	
Most significant achievement to date	





In 1929 English writer Virginia Woolf published a long essay titled 'A Room of One's Own', in which she said that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'.

Having a room of your own or at least a private space is important for everyone, whether they are writers of fiction or not. Equally, some money is important for independence. In this documentary, describe the spaces where each of the girls spends much of their time. While in some cases this is at home, the reality of 'home' is very different for each of these girls.

- In what ways is a home often a communal space?
- How do Breani's and Katie's rooms, and the way they are decorated, express their interests?
- How are the places where Kimsey, Aziza, Habiba and Manu are filmed quite different?
- What does privacy mean to you?
- Is it important for you to have a room of your own that you can live in as you like, where you can do your own thing and set the room up to reflect your personality and passions?
- Has the twentieth-century expectation of having a private space had any detrimental effects on people's lives? How might close-quartered communal living – with several generations living under one roof – enrich people's lives?

C. Wives and mothers

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- Which of these six girls has had a child before they are twenty years old?
- Which of the girls has had to curtail her studies to become a wife and/or a mother?
- How might teenage parenthood – whether as a sole parent or as one of a couple – make it more difficult to make choices about study, outside paid work and relationships?
- Comment on the different role models represented by the mothers of the girls.
- How are fathers and grandparents also shown

In Cambodia, girls' education is critical to breaking a vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy and abuse that traps many girls and women in developing countries. In Cambodia, where girls and women are vulnerable to being trafficked into the sex industry and other exploitative situations, education is key to reducing their vulnerability and giving them options for a better life.

http://asiafoundation.org/media/view/video/Cewt_HKx7OM/partnering-for-girls-education--cambodia

to have important roles in some of the girls' lives?

- Have you ever heard a musician or an actor or a scientist or an artist asked what it is like to be a 'working father'? What does the term, 'working mother' or 'homemaker' or 'stay-at-home mum' imply about women's roles?

D. Key factors in improving the lives of girls

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- How can education in several areas of life (not just in basic literacy) help girls to make choices about their future?
- Describe how education is regarded by some of the girls shown in the film?
- How is a lack of basic education (sometimes for economic reasons but also when it is considered as unimportant for girls) one of the main reasons why girls both marry and have children while they are still teenagers?
- How important are family members in the lives of these girls in encouraging their children to stay at school and to seek help when needed?
- Does being a child in a single-parent family have any apparent influence on how girls will value themselves?
- Discuss family and cultural expectations about how these girls moving towards adulthood will live their lives. In which cases do the cultural expectations within the society where the family lives affect the lives of the girls, either positively or negatively? How is change possible in their lives?
- Thinking about the stories shown in the film, information in this guide and your own understandings, why do you think inequalities still exist in first-world developed countries like Australia between males and females,

The first report to COAG (Council of Australian Governments) on the status of women and girls in Australia has revealed a baffling contrast between good gains in women's education and the continued lack of opportunity in the workforce.

The council's report finds that girls are developmentally more prepared than boys before starting school, have higher average school performance and are more likely to complete Year 12. And for the first time, more women under thirty are attaining higher level qualifications than their male peers.

But despite the considerable work done over the last thirty years to narrow the pay gap, even upon graduation women's salaries are below those of male graduates. The pay gap between men and women remains at 17.5 per cent.

The report showed that workforce participation rates were lower for women and they were also underrepresented in leadership roles in both the public and private sector.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report recently ranked Australia first in female educational attainment out of 136 participating countries – but when it came to labour force participation we plummeted to 52nd.

The council's report was compiled at the request of the COAG Select Council on Women's Issues to assist in the development of a National Framework for Gender Equality.

<https://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/media/releases/2013-11-19>



would employ for choosing your six subjects? Doing this as a global project would obviously be logistically and financially quite difficult, but as you live in Australia you should be able to find willing subjects from a broad range of cultures and backgrounds.

- Outline who your ideal six would be – not celebrities who get plenty of opportunities to tell their stories but six seventeen- or eighteen-year-olds with stories to tell about their experiences growing up male. How could you ensure that each subject had a compelling life experience to share?
- How might your subjects feel constrained and unable to be themselves because of family pressures and peer and society expectations of boys?
- What key life experiences might you possibly find... or would anticipating these skew your choices?

particularly in the workforce?

- Outline three things you believe would make the greatest difference in improving the numbers of female members of parliaments in Australia.

Or

Suggest alternative approaches to having greater influence in society for women.

- How can cultural/religious practices such as 'genital mutilation' of babies and young children be stopped throughout the world?

E. What about boys?

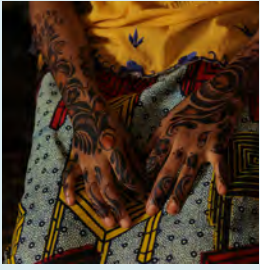
I AM A BOY

Boys and men clearly have a major role to play in how girls break free of the constraints that stop them playing a full role in their communities, governments and the world. The role of fathers and brothers is crucial in families as children mature. One way or another, many boys will have to engage with women who are not their mother or sisters.

Imagine you have the opportunity to pitch a film or a series for television to a production company about being a boy in the world today.

- What would be the guiding principles you





The Director's Statement

Rebecca Barry – Producer/Director of *I Am a Girl*

Read through Rebecca Barry's statement about why she made this film and respond to the questions in bold scattered throughout the text.

My driving passion is to facilitate stories, share these with an audience in a creative way, and get people thinking. I am a storyteller and an adventurer at heart, with a deep desire to share new perspectives and observations about our world with an audience.

*My current documentary, *I Am a Girl*, has been inspired by my travels around the planet. I love exploring the complexity, history, creativity of the places I visit and I have an endless curiosity about the resilience of people and culture, particularly their women and girls.*

The cold hard reality is that if you are born a girl in this world today, in every measurable way you will be at a disadvantage. This is an overlooked fact in mainstream media and yet it is a problem with global significance, with 52 per cent of the world's population directly affected.

Why have I told this story?

Four years ago I was lucky enough to survive a tsunami whilst on holiday in Samoa. This event was the most frightening and levelling experience of my life. With my brush with death came a realisation that perhaps for the first time, I did not have control, in those moments, over my life and its outcomes. Upon later reflection I came to understand that for many (if not most) girls in the world today this is a feeling they live with everyday.

- Is it only when you lose control that you fully realise the importance of controlling at least some aspects of your life?

I was moved to tears as I read a magazine article about the plight of girls. Despite technological advances and the abundance of wealth, today we live in a world that openly discriminates against girls. They are not religious or political activists ... they are girls. It is on this basis alone from which the most incomprehensible violence, health issues and abuse transpires.

- Are there any situations in your life where you feel that being a girl disadvantages you or inhibits you from doing what you would like to do or makes you feel unsafe?

Knowing this information brought me to the point

*where I asked myself the question, what can I do about this? I decided to make this film, which could reach out to a broader audience to inform, to give people the opportunity to connect and do something through our partners. Can a film change the way we think? Or even change these grotesque statistics? I truly believe it can. My vision for *I Am a Girl* is pure and simple – to weave a universal story through the voices of girls in various locations around the world, dealing with different challenges. Through poetic and thoughtful cinematography by Nicola Daley we have approached each story as a portrait, poignant in its simplicity. Whether it is a story of abuse, neglect, optimism or hope, each story follows the daily toil from sunrise to sunset.*

- Why is it important to see and hear from the girls in their worlds and in their words rather than reading a statistical account about unequal opportunities for girls in different countries?

Aziza, Kimsey, Breani, Katie, Manu, Habiba and Jaya (who appears in our additional online materials) are strength and resilience personified. They are smart and funny but caught up in the predicament of birth and culture.

The experience of making this film has been incredible. Not just meeting our girls and facilitating their stories but also in the way that this film has captured the imaginations of individuals and organisations that helped resource its production.

This film has been funded entirely through philanthropic grants via the Documentary Australia Foundation. This is an incredible feat and I hope we have set a positive precedent for more documentary films to be made in this way. Without the guidance and support of the Documentary Australia Foundation this film would not have been made.

- Do you think it is important for documentaries such as *I Am a Girl* to be made and broadcast on mainstream free-to-air television?

Our donors reflect a broad spectrum of organisations, which are visionary in their support of the film. Plan Australia, the Intrepid Foundation, Girlosophy, the Thyne Reid Foundation, Women's Plans Foundation and the Weir Anderson Foundation and many other private donors are all a part of an alliance with the common vision to celebrate the value of girls. We have also received in-kind support from other NGOs and businesses such as Deluxe (Australia's largest post-production house), which have enabled the highest quality completion of the film. It has been a privilege to be the conduit bringing us all together.

- Who do you think would be Rebecca Barry's ideal audience for this film, apart from 'as many people as possible'?

A tribe made this film. We are part of the zeitgeist and the bigger movement around the world that is set to show the value of women and girls. It has been such an honour to be the captain of the ship and I can't wait for what change is ahead.

Financing the film

I Am a Girl was made and financed in a unique way. The film was funded primarily through philanthropic donations facilitated through the Documentary Australia Foundation.

The Documentary Australia Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that provides information and resources to philanthropic grantmakers, charitable organisations and documentary filmmakers in order to explore, share and enhance their mutual objectives of creating a better society. See <<http://www.documentaryaustralia.com.au>> for information about this organisation and the range of projects they assist with funding, and links to other philanthropic organisations.

This film was financed through an alliance with NGOs, (Non Government Organisations), individuals, industry partners and commercial entities including Intrepid Travel, Plan Australia, Women's Plans Foundation, The Thyne Reid Foundation, Weir Anderson Foundation and eighty-seven individual donations from a crowdfunding campaign.

Producer/Director Rebecca Barry says 'making a film with philanthropic partners has been an extraordinary experience as a filmmaker. To collaborate with individuals and organisations with similar interests has created a rewarding experience.'

- What does being a philanthropist or part of a philanthropic organisation involve? Research the meaning of the word if you are not sure of its meaning.
- Are you aware of any individuals and/or corporations that have a strong philanthropic bent? Look up 'Charitable Foundations' online and Philanthropy Australia.
- How does making money from a film relate to making films that have something important to say about what is happening in the world today?
- What is 'crowdfunding' and how does it work?

THE FILMMAKERS

I Am A Girl is a Testify Media production financed by Documentary Australia Foundation

Director and Producer:
Rebecca Barry

Cinematographer:
Nicola Daley

Composer:
John Gray

Editor:
Lindi Harrison

Associate/All Media Producer:
Ester Harding

Executive Producer:
Mitzi Goldman



References and Resources

The program's website

<http://www.iamagirl.com.au>

Brainwash: The Gender Equality Paradox

Watch this thirty-minute Norwegian film on youtube at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiJVJ5QRRUE>>

Nina Funnel and Danniele Miller, *Loveability: An Empowered Girl's Guide to Dating and Relationships*, Harper Collins eBook, 2014

An article by Gail Kelly, CEO of the Westpac Bank in Australia about her experiences of the need for education for girls

<<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/gail-kelly-we-must-help-all-girls-get-an-education-20131010-2vb06.html>>

Information about gendercide in the world today

<<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/01/16/it%E2%80%99s-a-girl-the-three-deadliest-words-in-the-world/>>

co.uk/2012/01/16/it%E2%80%99s-a-girl-the-three-deadliest-words-in-the-world/>

Selection of recent media about *I Am a Girl*:

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TV

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-02/new-film-explores-gender-inequality/4930506>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-24/growing-up-female-in-the-21stcentury/4910088>

Radio

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-02/rebecca-barry-director-of-i-am-a-girl-interviewed/4927916>

<http://www.eaglewavesradio.com.au/2013/09/the-hoopla-radio-hour-3-september-2013/>

Online

<http://www.sbs.com.au/films/movie/15672/I-Am-A-Girl/>

<http://thehoopla.com.au/girl/>

<http://www.mamamia.com.au/social/i-am-a-girl-documentary/>

<http://www.popcorntaxi.com.au/2013/08/audio/rebecca-barry-on-her-stunning-documentary-i-am-a-girl/>

<http://megaphoneoz.com/?p=6695>

<http://www.amnesty.org.au/afghanwomen/comments/32671/>

<http://www.filmink.com.au/features/gender-lines/>

(Endnotes)

1 <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2013/09/18/women-in-parliament-australia-vs-the-world.aspx>

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To experience more please go to: <http://www.iamagirl.com.au/education>



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