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<https://filmink.com.au/public-notice/making-difference-challenging-area-films4change/>

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN A CHALLENGING AREA – FILMS4CHANGE

A small Australian company is making a big splash – making short films that promise social change... and dare to make a difference.

Films4Change tackles subjects like domestic violence, suicide prevention, racism and social isolation. Formed just two years ago, their not-for-profit charity has been engaged by community groups, screened at festivals, aired on TV... and in every case, been instrumental in making a difference – being, as their name implies: a positive force for change!

The company has partnered with numerous community organisations to create films for social education purposes. Their first client was Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CALD) group that commissioned a series of films that could help women in domestic violence situations.

Their next series of films were made in conjunction with Relationships Australia & the facilitators from the Men's Behaviour Change programs. This series, titled *It's Just A Choice*, was created for men's behavioural change programs. Powerful and confronting, the films demonstrate various aspects of abusive behaviour in relationships – *and* offered positive options for change.

Films4Change also hold film workshops. One of these recently involved young carers learning aspects of film-making, culminating in a short film being produced in a single day. Another, in conjunction with the Salvation Army Oasis on the NSW Central Coast, involved young people spending two days creating a series of vignettes on healthy relationships.

Their current project is a documentary in partnership with the Primary Care & the Family Wellbeing course facilitators, portraying the work they do with young indigenous men on a journey of reconnection with their spiritual and cultural roots.

The creative force behind Films4Change is the trio of Melinda Arnold, Jerry Retford and Val Athanassiou and they are not shy to admit they have their own personal experiences which motivate their passion to make a difference.





Brothers in Arms



TABOO – Toni Altavilla



Old School - Stavros



Daddy Outlaw – Dave



Of Course God is Italian - Sal

Val Athanassiou

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WWII - G.I. Jack



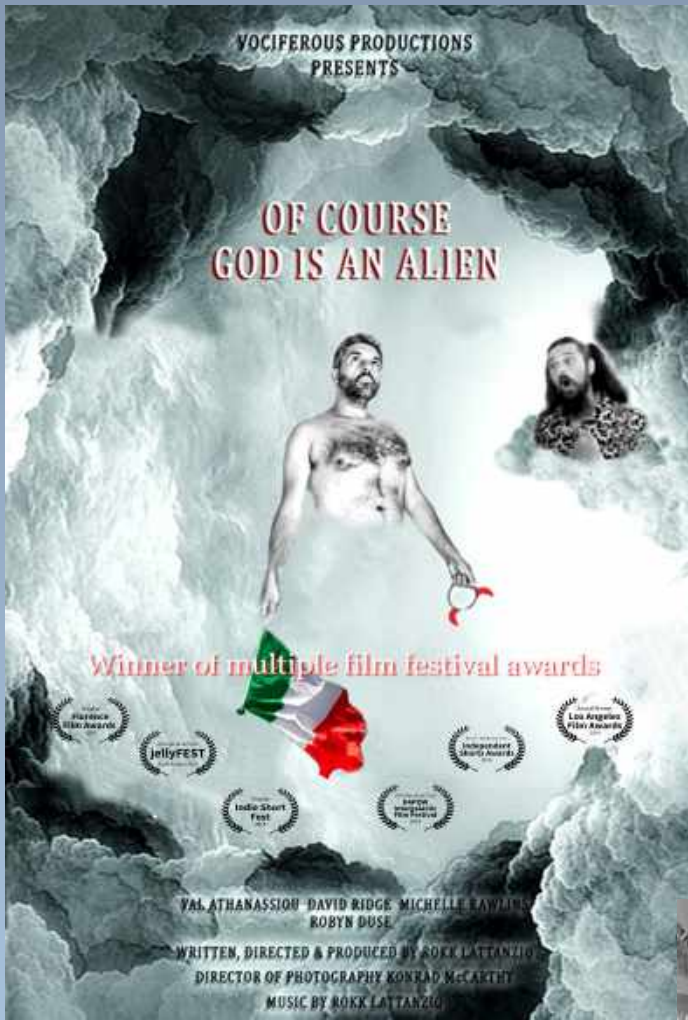
It's Just a Choice – Joe Arnold



Deadly Women – Frank Columbo



Something About Bindis – Jake



For Melinda Arnold and Jerry Retford, films about domestic violence are personal

Garry Maddox

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For Melinda Arnold, it took time to realise the danger signs of domestic violence.

"It escalated over time," the actor and filmmaker said quietly in the lead-up to White Ribbon Day, the international day for the elimination of violence against women. "It started with verbal abuse

then it was emotional, psychological and then physical abuse.



Clip: It's Just a Choice

WARNING: Content may disturb. A short film about domestic violence which seeks to change the mindset and environment that allow it to happen. Video courtesy Films4Change

"It ended quite badly with me running from the house and the police being called."

Arnold's former partner was charged by the police but, tragically, never faced court.

"He took his own life a few days later, which is a horrible thing," she said.

"He took his own life a few days later, which is a horrible thing," she said.

Arnold's current partner, Jerry Retford, has his own horror story about domestic violence, though he was perpetrator rather than victim.

At one of the low points of his life, he raged at two police officers in the front yard of his then-partner's home after she called them to make him leave.

"I remember standing up to this copper saying 'f---ing Mace me, you're going to have to f---ing Mace me,'" Retford said.



"A lot of men are just emotionally immature." Melinda Arnold and Val Athanassiou in an image from the It's Just A Choice series of short films about domestic violence

"Thankfully he was an older and wiser copper who was like 'Mate, I just want to take you for a cup of tea and have a chat. So why don't you get in the car and we'll go down the station'."

Retford was taken to hospital where he received the treatment that allowed him to gradually turn his life around over a decade.

"I was very physically and verbally abusive in my marriage," he said. "And then very verbally and emotionally abusive in a subsequent relationship. I really got to the point where it couldn't go on any more."

Retford went through a Relationships Australia course on taking responsibility three times before he was able to control his emotions.

"It was massively life-changing," he said. "The men that I was working alongside, they weren't psychopaths or monsters."

"They were men that needed help with their behaviour. But more than that, they were men - and I count myself in this - that needed to emotionally grow up."

Inspired by their experiences, the Central Coast couple has launched an initiative to address the alarming incidence of domestic violence in Australia.

Through a production company with fellow actor Val Athanassiou called Films4Change, they have made a series of short films under the banner *It's Just A Choice* to help men realise they can change how they respond to stress about money, work or relationships.

Instead of reacting angrily, they are encouraged to calm down, think through why they feel so upset and respond in ways that support their partner.

Organisations working with troubled men have started screening the short films to spark discussion.

"These are so freaking good!"

"I have watched many videos that were designed to educate about DV issues, but nothing remotely as well-done as these."

These words from David Wexler of the Relationship Training Institute, San Diego California. Read on to see how our small charity film production company has partnered in the US with this leader in the field of men's behavioural change.



Films4Change is pleased to announce our partnership with David B. Wexler & the Relationship Training Institute in San Diego, California. The RTI is a non-profit running 'Internationally Recognised Programs for Relationship Development and Domestic Violence Prevention, Training & Consultation'. RTI's 'STOP Program' is now integrating many of our *It's Just a Choice* video vignettes into their internationally-recognised programs treating relationship violence.

This is a fantastic connection for us both & we are so proud to be working with David & contributing to his program around the world.

It has also given us renewed incentive to commence work on our second 'It's Just A Choice' series.

For more information & to help us get this valuable project off the ground please see our Australian Cultural Fund

<https://australianculturalfund.org.au/connect/its-just-a-choice-series-2/>



Director Jerry Retford, producer and actor Val Athanassiou, actor Andrew Thomson and actor and producer Melinda Arnold.

Picture: PETER CLARK

Terry Collins

SHORT FILM SHINES THE SPOTLIGHT ON BRAIN CANCER STRUGGLES

A SHORT film made on the Central Coast to highlight the devastating effects of brain cancer has been chosen as a top 10 finalist for the Cause Film Festival in Sydney.

Formed by a small group of local actors determined to raise awareness of social issues last year, Films4Change shot *Something About Bindis* entirely on the Central Coast.

Directed and filmed by Jerry Retford, the film features Coast actors Melinda Arnold, Val Athanassiou, Paul Russell and Andrew Thomson.

"The film is based upon true events and it was originally a play written by Karen Eastwood," Arnold said.

"Val Athanassiou, Paul Russell and I performed in it at Short and Sweet Newcastle back in 2010 and it was directed by Annie Bilton.

"Then a few months ago I approached the writer about adapting it into a short film and she was happy to allow us to do so.

"It's a really interesting piece which compares cancer cells to bindis and by making it we were

hoping to raise awareness of brain cancer and support the Brain Cancer fund.

"Regardless of the results of the Cause festival next week, we intend to enter the film in other festivals and keep raising that awareness."

Retford said the film was about the pain people had to struggle through when their lives were touched by brain cancer.

"Hopefully it will really help people understand," he said.

"One thing working on this film

has taught me is to stop saying 'one day I will do this or that'. It makes you realise there might not be many more days for any of us."

Films4Change is also working on an ongoing basis on a series of films highlighting domestic violence, which it hopes will eventually be used as a learning tool by help groups.

Any prizewinning money won by the group will be donated to the Cure Brain Cancer Foundation and Wyong Hospital.

Check the Films4Change page

HELPING CHARITIES

■ The Cause Film Festival is an annual festival now in its second year, which aims to support charities and good causes and at the same time give film makers the chance to help promote the charity or cause they support.

■ Winners of this year's festival will be announced next Thursday, September 24.

on Facebook for more details and updates.

Top three Novocastrian films to Sydney

BY MELLIE HEJDUK

TEN minutes is not long to showcase your best work onstage.

But it was long enough for Newcastle's Short and Sweet's top three plays to stand out from the crowd after a five night season at the Playhouse.

Something About Bindis, Incoming and The Talk Down were chosen to play at the Sydney Short and Sweet festival in February.

Normally only the best production, in this case, Something About Bindis, gains entry to the Short and Sweet Sydney season.

But Short and Sweet mastermind Mark Cleary was so impressed with the local talent - directors, actors, playwrights and backstage crew - that he invited the top three to perform.

So Incoming, which was runner up and won the people's choice award, and The Talk Down, for which Trent Blaines won best actor, will join Something About Bindis in Sydney in February.

All in all, Newcastle's inaugural Short and Sweet competition exceeded expectations across the board.

Newcastle City Council cultural development coordinator Mardi Ryan said the aim of the program was to give writers a better chance to have their work assessed.

From the program, mentoring match ups, writers workshops and skill building also emerged.

"It was a huge community cultural development process," she said.

"It was all volunteer power, the project would have fallen over without them, we are totally indebted to them."

It was not only the Short and Sweet entrants that enjoyed themselves.

It seems the whole of Newcastle got behind the program with about 470 people turning out over the five nights to see "mostly unknown writers, unknown actors and unknown content".



SUCCESS: Something About Bindis director Annie Bilton with cast members Paul Russell, Val Athanassiou and Melinda Arnold and writer Karen Eastwood. - Picture by Courtney Laura.

Quality hits home

THREE plays in Newcastle's first Short + Sweet Festival will be included in the annual Sydney Short + Sweet Festival early next year.

When the Newcastle festival was organised this year, Sydney Short + Sweet officials agreed to accept the winning entry as one of the top 100 plays for their 2011 festival.

But Short + Sweet founder Mark Cleary was so impressed by the quality of the local works on Friday he offered to give automatic entry to the three best Newcastle plays.

At Saturday's closing night of the Newcastle festival, *Something About Bindis* was chosen as the best play, with *Incoming* and *The Talk Down* as the runners-up.

The Short + Sweet plays have to be no longer than 10 minutes.

Newcastle will again have a Short + Sweet festival in 2011.

- Ken Longworth