



Pictured above: poster for the project 'Womenarche', a film by Ellie Cheesman, supported by the IAF

Thanks to the funding and support letter from the IAF, I was able to secure some further funding with the Regional Arts Fund through Country Arts SA, and successfully received a further \$5000. With this total of \$6000, including the \$1000 from the *Independent Arts Foundation*, I was able to upgrade my filmmaking equipment to make the highly successful film, 'Womenarche'. This film and the equipment upgrade has provided a higher platform and a strong foundation for my career as an emerging young regional filmmaker. The IAF funding was used for my equipment, my time and my submissions to film festivals. I have submitted to over 40 festivals (which cost a total of \$1900) and am still waiting to hear back from 20 festivals - as they will occur later in this year or early next year – to hear whether we were accepted to be screened, as finalists or winners, or not.

The film was submitted on FilmFreeway (an industry official website for festival submissions) and won 'Best International Film' at the Paris International Film Awards (2022). The film was also officially selected to be screened at the 'Golden Short Film Festival' in Italy and the 'Berlin Indie Film Festival'.

An article in the ABC was published about the project and I received emails from people, mostly parents of daughters, from people all over Australia, and even an offer for a radio

interview in Ireland, which I accepted. I also did an interview with the ABC radio that I was offered about the film project. Here is the link to the ABC article:

<https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/womenarche-movie-girls-first-period-menarche/100920768>

This film opened a conversation for young people, I'm often asked by teenagers about the film and the process of menarche. I received great feedback from parents who said that they were delighted to have some resources that would make their children feel more comfortable. I have given a few screenings and talks in my community and schools in Port Lincoln, SA, which sparked a lot of excited conversation about shared experiences from a group of 13-15 year olds. The film was also integrated as a resource into a catholic school program – 'The Rite Journey' – for year 9s.

For the film process, I interviewed three eleven year old dancers, an eighteen year old elite swimmer, a yoga instructor and a professional free diver. These girls/women shared their perceptions and experiences of menarche and the menstrual process, and by opening a conversation about it, I believe we have made great progress towards destigmatising women's bodies. The film took about eight months to create.

My goal in the future is to make other films like this one, exploring different cultures and providing opportunities for people to share their stories and open a dialogue.