



**Story Money Impact**

# BECAUSE WE ARE GIRLS

CASE STUDY

IMPACT PRODUCING IN A CANADIAN FRAMEWORK

FUNDED BY

**TELEFILM** PARTNER  
CANADA OF CHOICE



PRODUCED BY

Story Money Impact 2021 Pod Team

# THE FILM

*BECAUSE WE ARE GIRLS* (2019)  
85 MINUTES

## SYNOPSIS

A conservative Indo-Canadian family in small-town British Columbia comes to terms with a devastating secret: three sisters were sexually abused as children by an older relative. After nearly two and a half decades of silence, the sisters come forward — not only to protect young relatives but to show their daughters that change is possible.

Documentarian Baljit Sangra sensitively explores the impact of sexual abuse on a family, turning her empathetic lens on revealing moments in the family's life. We witness the emotional toll on the sisters of pursuing justice through the courts and confronting their family for not protecting them as children. Full of nuance, *Because We Are Girls* weaves past and present, darkness and light. But we also share their happiness as the sisters forge stronger bonds with their daughters and dance to their favourite Bollywood songs. By showing touching home videos of the young, innocent sisters as children alongside uplifting scenes of the strong, empowered women they have become, the film explores the journey to healing and the family's unconditional love flowing freely through it all. *Because We Are Girls* offers a unique and powerful tribute to women's strength in the face of profound trauma.

VIDEO

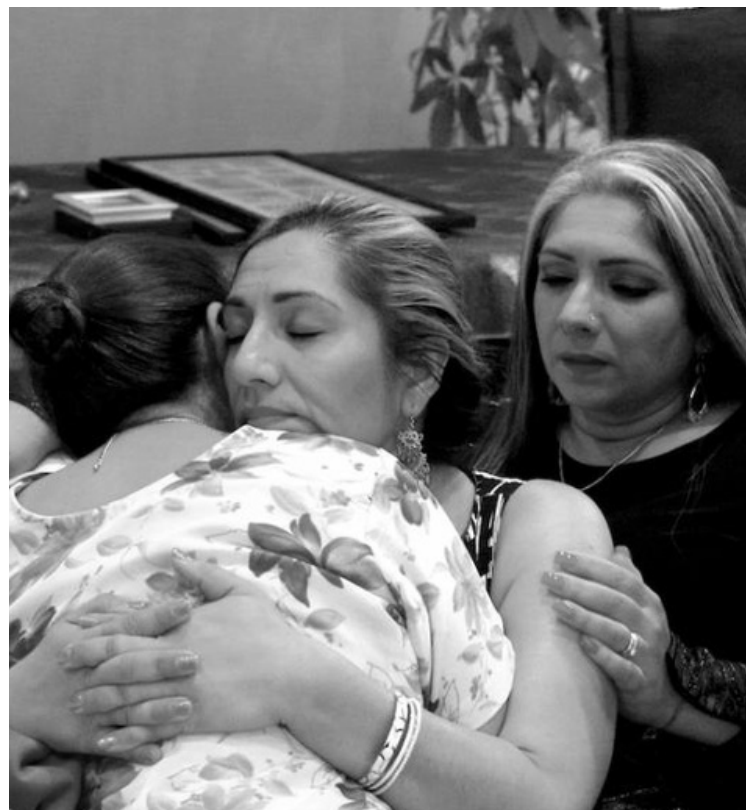


WEBSITE



## FILM TEAM

- Director & Writer - Baljit Sangra
- Producer - Selwyn Jacon
- Associate Producer - Teri Snelgrove
- Director of Photography - Grant Baldwin
- Editors - Carmen Pollard, Jessica Dymond
- Family Members in the Film - Jeeti Pooni, Kira Pooni, Salakshana Pooni, Narinder Pooni (Mom), Gurdev Pooni (Dad), Jesse Pooni, Chandani Pooni, Surjit Sumra, Maheema Sumra, Shia Sumra, Raj Rana
- DCM[SB1] Team - Katja De Bock, Elise Labbe, Hannah Martin
- NFB Audience Development Team - Jane Gutteridge, Donna Cowan
- Education Guide - Nimi Chauhan
- Co-produced by the NFB



# IMPACT

*Because We Are Girls* had incredible momentum through the expert distribution support of the NFB including its festival, broadcast, community screening and streaming service run. The film explores difficult subjects -- not only child sexual abuse but also racism, gender-based discrimination and complex dynamics within families and especially South Asian families. Director Baljit Sangra witnessed first-hand the profound response in viewers and the film's impact as a vehicle of community engagement. The film sparked long overdue conversations not only within the South Asian community but society at large facing the Me Too movement and a collective reckoning with systemic racism and racially-based violence. Many audience members became enthusiastic partners in the film's distribution; helping get audiences out, planning additional screenings and volunteering their time to work for the justice on the issues at hand.

Impact producing as a recognized field is relatively new and the NFB relied on a more traditional model of marketing and distribution for *Because We Are Girls*. As such, there was no clearly articulated impact strategy or campaign and no one person to oversee the campaign as the impact producer. Though the director and film participants were often asked to speak about child sexual abuse, there was no concrete strategy about how the film could be used as a tool for change. A dedicated impact producer could have harnessed the incredible momentum of *Because We Are Girls* amplifying impact even further than its already impressive reach.

Further limiting reach was the constraint that as a publicly funded organization, the NFB is prohibited from engaging in political advocacy. This fact limited the scope and activities of NFB organized screenings and activities, precluding any direct policy or political advocacy. One can't help wonder if this restraint hadn't been in place and if there had been an impact producer and campaign, if the film could have contributed in an even more substantive way to transformative change through progressive policy change, political advocacy and farther reaching public discourse.

So many important and courageous films like this are made in this country without adequate post-release support. While relatively new, the field of impact producing is key to amplifying impact and creating transformative change. The lack of resources for a dedicated impact producer for *Because We Are Girls* draws attention to the need for expanding resources for impact campaigns in Canada. Filmmakers, distributors and perhaps most importantly, the justice issues at hand, deserve nothing less.





## FESTIVALS, THEATRES & COMMUNITY SCREENINGS



*Because We Are Girls* premiered at the prestigious HotDocs Film Festival to a standing ovation and opened the DOXA Film Festival. In the end, the film was selected for 21 national and international film festivals and received 4 awards, 1 honourable mention and 3 nominations.

Shortly after its festival run, it was programed at the local Vancity Theatre for 6 sold out screenings, all followed by Q&As with the director and/or film participants. This successful theatrical run led to many invitations to screen the film at conferences, museums, universities, resource centres and more. Using the NFB community engagement budget, many screenings and Q&As also made their way to smaller, rural communities.



Finally, the film was screened in recognition and to support the aims and objectives of International Women's Day (in libraries across Canada), International Day of the Girl Child, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the United Nations International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women and Human Rights Day.

The NFB organized support services in the form of a counsellor at public events for audience members triggered by the content of the film.

## BROADCASTS AND STREAMING

*Because We Are Girls* streamed on Knowledge Network with over 830,000 views, as well as on Amazon Prime. It's also available through the NFB's web site, where it's one of their most-watched films.

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Having the right content on the right platform in relation to the objective of that platform is one angle that will develop discoverability in the future. For example, on Amazon Prime, we have over 300 titles. But when you hit the right title, it represents millions of views. Just one title, *Because We Are Girls* [directed by Baljit Sangra] produced 18 million viewing minutes on Amazon Prime. [The film itself is 85 minutes.]”

- Jérôme Dufour, Director General, Distribution, Communications and Marketing at the NFB, in [POV Magazine](#)

## ORGANIZATIONAL OUTREACH

The team reached out to organizations with widespread networks that focus on reducing violence against women, including:

### 5 PROVINCIAL GROUPS



**BUILDING A  
BIGGER WAVE**  
Provincial Network for VAW  
Coordinating Committees



**BC Society of  
Transition Houses**



**ACWS**  
Alberta Council of  
Women's Shelters

**OCASI**  
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

**Client  
Management  
System**

### 3 NATIONAL GROUPS



**LEAF  
FAEJ**  
WOMEN'S LEGAL  
EDUCATION & ACTION FUND  
FONDS D'ACTION ET D'ÉDUCATION  
JURIDIQUE POUR LES FEMMES

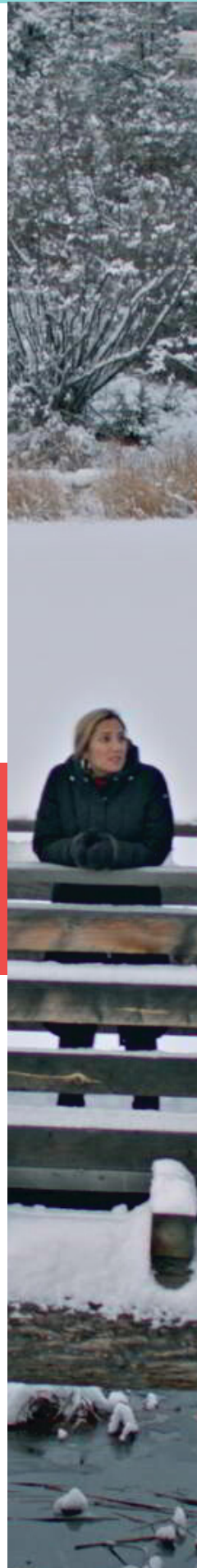


Canadian Federation  
of University Women

**CASAC ACCCACS**

Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres  
Association canadienne des centres contre les agressions à caractère s

Provincial Associations of  
Social Workers



## EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

### CAMPUS

These media tools will help you see, understand and experience the world differently.

The NFB featured *Because We Are Girls* in the "New Releases" channel on NFB.ca/Education site for 6 months and the "Diversity and Inclusion" channel permanently. It is also part of the NFB's CAMPUS program, a subscription based service that offers expanded online access to NFB educational resources. CAMPUS has a large distribution reach to students K-12, post-secondary students and teachers and is tagged under the following themes: sexual abuse, shame, trauma, gender stereotypes, South Asian identity, healthy relationships and reporting violence.

The team also targeted the gender, sexuality and women's studies departments at universities and colleges across the country, in an effort to host on-campus and community screenings in concert with special events and/or initiatives. The key target groups were legal, human rights and inter-faith organizations as well as social justice groups.

*Because We Are Girls* continues to make impact through online screenings and educational platforms.





Dear Ms. Sangra,

I am sure when you made the film *Because We Are Girls* you knew you would have a profound impact on other survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) within the Indian community. I am writing to thank you and to also thank Jeeti, Kira and Salakshana Pooni for their courage. I document below the profound influence you have had on my family's attitude towards CSA and also towards survivors like me.

I am a survivor of abuse by my cousin sister's husband but unlike the Pooni sisters, my abuse happened in India where it is even more difficult to bring criminal justice to act upon reports of historic child sexual abuse. However, it is the influence of your documentary on my family that I want to tell you about. My family has remained tongue tied and emotionally twisted about my abuse even though they have known about it for decades, and I am not the only survivor. I come from a highly educated and financially stable family which you would expect would be able to take action. However, there was more victim blaming than I care to talk about just as the Pooni sisters faced. This changed recently when, two young women (born and brought up in North America) in my family came upon your film. They have used this documentary as a lightning rod to raise awareness about the long term impacts of CSA on survivors. While my family cannot look me in the eye to speak about the atrocities done to me, they find it so much easier to talk about these crimes using the documentary *Because We Are Girls*. It has not been a safe place for survivors in our family, but thanks to your documentary my family is coming around to see how ethically blind they have been by covering up the crimes in the interests of protecting the family.

So, with this email I wanted to thank you and the Pooni sisters for their courage – the film has had an impact way beyond their daughters and their community.

– Anonymous