
BACKTRACK BOYS

A FILM BY CATHERINE SCOTT

PRESS KIT

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FEATURE LENGTH DOCUMENTARY
BACKTRACK BOYS

RUNNING TIME
100 MINS

IN CINEMAS OCTOBER 25

DIRECTOR PRODUCER WRITER
Catherine Scott

GENRE | KEY THEMES
Youth, Social Justice, Wellbeing, Rural

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Catherine Scott and Bernie Shakeshaft are available for interviews.
Film excerpts and high-res photo stills available on request.



A group of troubled boys are on a perilous course toward jail until they meet up with a free-wheeling jackaroo, Bernie Shakeshaft, and hit the road with his legendary dog jumping team.

This inspiring coming of age story follows the boys as they strive to turn their lives around - and the dogs that help tame their wild ways.

"I hope this film will foster a greater understanding of the issues these kids face and inspire communities to develop real alternatives that will help keep them out of jail".

- Catherine Scott



Quick Summary

- World Premiere at the Sydney Film Festival and winner of the audience award for Best Documentary.
- Observational film about the extraordinary impact one determined man, with the backing of the community, can have on the lives of young people doing it tough in the bush.
- Funded philanthropically through Documentary Australia Foundation and government film agencies Screen Australia and Create NSW.
- Currently screening on the Australian Festival Circuit (see full list below).
- National cinema release October 25
- 2019 summer tour with a travelling pop up drive-in to rural and regional Australia.
- Hosted screenings coordinated in conjunction with community groups.
- Communities can use this film to bring together senior decision makers, police, local government, education and service providers, youth organisations and young people to explore alternatives to locking up kids up in juvenile detention and focus on prevention programs.
- VOD and television to roll out later down the track.



Film Synopsis

A group of troubled boys are on a perilous course towards jail until they meet up with the rough talking, free-wheeling jackaroo, Bernie Shakeshaft, and hit the road with his legendary dog jumping team.

This observational documentary, filmed over two years, follows boys in a youth program that Bernie runs from a shed on the outskirts of Armidale, a rural town in Australia. On the road, the boys find their voice, make great friendships and the dogs become national champions. But as the boy's sleep under the stars at night the trauma is never too far away. With their survival and futures at stake they must constantly step up, push themselves, support each other and some days can be hard. This inspiring coming of age story reveals the challenges and triumphs these boys face as they try to find their place in the world, and the dogs that help tame their wild ways.



BackTrack Youth Works

With the economic and social decline in rural Australia more young people are falling through the cracks. Disillusioned and neglected many of them drop out of school and get caught up with drugs and crime. When everyone else gives up on these teenage kids in Armidale, NSW, they head to BackTrack. It's a place where they can feel safe, continue their education, get trained in welding and other job skills, but most importantly it's where they learn to support each other and pursue their hopes and dreams.

In the last 12 years over 1000 kids have walked through the Backtrack doors and in the same time juvenile crime rate has significantly decreased. The program succeeds where others have failed. It's an alternative to detention and costs a fraction of the price but funding is always a struggle. The majority of BackTrack's funding comes from philanthropy and individual donors. For all their great success Bernie is still pained by the kids who don't make it, but it's what drives him to do more. He is always filling the gaps. When the boys are couch surfing in different places Bernie opens a residency for some of the boys to live. Now the community are also lending a hand with local nannas coming in to show the boys how to shop, cook and iron while farmers are training them on the job. Bernie has a team of tireless Backtrack workers making all of this possible. It's become a model that other communities are keen to adopt and BackTrack is now mentoring a handful of other youth groups in regional NSW.



Bernie Shakeshaft

Backtrack Founder and CEO, Bernie was known as one of the best white trackers in the Northern Territory. On his final job Bernie worked on a dingo tracking research project which inspired some of the very work he does today at BackTrack that he started in 2006. A couple of old Aboriginal bushmen taught him how to track dingoes. "I use the same principles they taught me about wild dogs with these wild kids," he says. You can't chase 'em, you go out in front and calmly draw them in." The elders would get the wild dingoes come right up to them in the bush and they would lay them down quiet in the shade like a farm dog. Years later when Bernie started his youth program this would all come back. Introducing dogs into Backtrack would be a huge turning point and become the cornerstone of the program. All the kids look up to Bernie and his calm, "take no shit" approach seems to work wonders with them. You can never get kicked out of BackTrack and the kids stay as long as they need to. One of the reasons why Bernie is so successful is that he used to be just like them.

The BackTrack program is now over 12 years old and despite their great accomplishments and the dramatic drop in the local juvenile crime rate they receive no government support. Bernie is under great pressure to keep his program funded while more and more kids are walking through their gates. It costs around \$250,000 to incarcerate a young person in juvenile detention per year. Bernie spends a fraction of that cost but with much greater outcomes. Bernie's caring, unconventional style has won over the entire town and there is enormous pride and support. BackTrack has the backing of the council, local businesses, police, magistrates, schools and farmers. Parents of children in the program get to see their kids in the papers for good reasons: winning dog-jumping competitions, meeting the Prime Minister, helping flood-ravaged farmers. The kids get a chance to give back to the community and develop a real connection and respect.

Directors Statement

Backtrack Boys is a story I stumbled across, but not really by accident. I was originally drawn to this subject as I was training a diabetic alert dog for my seven-year old son, Charlie, who has diabetes type 1. I was fascinated by the relationship between humans and dogs and when I heard about BackTrack Youth Works I literally grabbed a camera, hopped in the car and made the six hour drive up to Armidale to meet Bernie and the kids. The rest is history.

This is an intimate observational feature documentary where we travel on the road with Bernie, the boys and the dogs. Filmed over two years, the boys have really taken centre stage of what has become an incredibly moving coming of age story. I developed a deep trust with Bernie and the boys and have filmed some extraordinary scenes in that time, stuff you simply could not write. A couple of the kids have really been up against it and had so much to overcome, particularly a young twelve-year old boy, Rusty, who has made quite a transformation in that time. I filmed the first day this wise cracking, rebellious, yet vulnerable boy walked through the BackTrack doors and that's when I knew I had a feature documentary.

I hope this film will give greater insight into youth doing it tough in rural Australia and foster a more in-depth understanding of the issues so desperately needed to develop successful, long-lasting social reforms. These are the kids who have fallen between the cracks of the education system and face a range of issues from family breakdowns, to violence, suicide, drugs and crime. The film features a former jackaroo, Bernie Shakeshaft, and shows how his unconventional youth program is turning kids' lives around. The film focuses on the challenging issues these young people must grapple with every day. And asks - why is Bernie's program working when so many others fail? What do these kids need from the rest of us in society so they can successfully launch into the world and escape the poverty-prison cycle?

Universal themes play out as these young boys strive to pull their lives together. Their very survival and futures are at stake. This story explores Bernie's philosophy through the journey of the boys in his care. It looks at how these kids navigate their relationships, deal with personal trauma, take responsibility for their own decisions and gain practical job skills so they can eventually create a sustainable life for themselves. It's been over a decade since Bernie started working with these kids and the juvenile crime rate has more than halved, the rural community of Armidale is now behind BackTrack and they're stepping in to lend a hand. This documentary presents a real model for other rural towns grappling with the same generational social crisis throughout Australia and the world.

Ultimately, *Backtrack Boys* is a small town, local yarn that addresses some of the most daunting social issues of our time.

- **Catherine Scott is the Producer, Director and Cinematographer of Backtrack Boys**



Director | Producer Biography

Catherine Scott has worked internationally as a documentary filmmaker for over 20 years. Her films have been broadcast on SBS TV, ABC TV, CBC Canada, PBS Television, Channel 4 and France 2. She was Senior Producer at Dateline SBS TV and Video Journalist on *India's Love Detectives*, *Lycra in Africa* and *Chasing the Dragon*, Producer, *Being Me* (Four Corners), Director/Co-producer of *Scarlet Road*, Director/Co-writer of *Selling Sickness* and Director/Co-producer of the Walkley Award-winning *Business Behind Bars* and *Profits of Punishment*.

Catherine spent time living in New York City for 13 years where she began her career as a member of the Paper Tiger TV collective co-producing over 30 productions including *Breathless* and *Drawing the Line at Pittston*. While in New York she also co-produced and directed documentaries for Deep Dish TV including *Who's Afraid of the Little Yellow School Bus?*, *The Last Graduation*, *Lock Down USA* and *The Gulf Crisis TV Project*.



Awards & Festivals

AWARDS

Audience Award for Best Documentary, Sydney Film Festival

Audience Award for Best Documentary, Melbourne International Film Festival

Audience Award for Best Film, Stronger Than Fiction Film Festival, Canberra

Short List for AACTA Award for Best Documentary [final nominees and winner TBC]

AUSTRALIAN FILM FESTIVALS

Sydney Film Festival

Melbourne International Film Festival

CineFest Oz, WA

Stronger Than Fiction Film Festival, Canberra

Vision Splendid Outback Film Festival, QLD

SFF - Travelling Film Festival - Huskisson, NSW

SFF - Travelling Film Festival - Toowoomba, QLD

Adelaide Film Festival

Brisbane International Film Festival

Byron Bay Film Festival

Heart of Gold Film Festival, QLD

Emerge Festival, NSW

Screen Wave Film Festival, NSW

IN CINEMAS OCTOBER 25

60 selected cinemas nationwide so far - our goal is 100so stay tuned!

Key Information

Original Title	Backtrack Boys
Year of production	2016, Australia
Duration	100 minutes
Genre	Observational, Feature Documentary
Director Producer Writer	Catherine Scott
Editor	Andrea Lang
Executive Producers	Dr Mitzi Goldman, Katie Barry
Consultant Producer	Madeleine Hetheron
Cinematographer	Catherine Scott
Composers	Kristin Rule, Jonathan Zwartz
Sound design	Angus Robertson, Peter Purcell, Tara Webb
Themes	Youth, Social justice, Wellbeing, Rural
Screening format	DCP
Original language	English (with subtitles option)
Aspect	1.78:1 or 16:9
Picture	Colour
Sound	5:1
Production Company	Infinity Pictures
Distributor [Australia/NZ]	Umbrella Entertainment
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