

PRESS KIT
WE BELIEVE YOU

a film by CHARLOTTE DEVILLERS AND ARNAUD DUFEYS

O'Brother presents
a Makintosh films production



WE BELIEVE YOU

(ON VOUS CROIT)

a film by
CHARLOTTE DEVILLERS AND ARNAUD DUFEYS

BELGIUM / 2025 / 78'
FORMAT: 4:3 / SOUND 5.1

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Synopsis

Today, Alice stands before a judge and there's no room for error. She must speak up for her children, as custody is being called into question. Can she protect them from their father before it's too late?



Interview

with CHARLOTTE DEVILLERS AND ARNAUD DUFEYS

***We Believe You* tackles deeply contemporary and sensitive issues. How did you strike a balance between the reality of domestic violence and cinematic fiction?**

From the outset of the writing process, we recognized that court hearings naturally follow a structure similar to that of a fiction film or play. The order in which words are spoken builds tension and leads to progressive revelations. The hearing was transcribed based on testimonies we gathered, which all shared certain similarities. The scenes preceding and following the hearing, however, were more fictionalized. These were crafted to fully immerse the audience in Alice's emotional journey – from her initial feelings of guilt to reclaiming her role as a mother after the hearing.

The film is inspired by your experience as a nurse, Charlotte. How did this expertise shape the writing and direction of the story?

The film is indeed inspired by my experience as a nurse, as well as my perspective as a woman and a mother. Observation and listening are central to both professions. Understanding patient's stories and communicating them to a team is something I've done daily, and these skills greatly influenced the writing and staging of the film.

You mention the importance of justice in this story. Why was it crucial for you to show this legal struggle and its complexities in the film?

It was crucial for us to portray how the protracted, repetitive, and often overwhelming nature of legal proceedings amplifies trauma. In our story, as in real life, children who are repeatedly asked to recount their experiences and whose words are questioned can feel unprotected.

From a child's perspective, time feels even longer, and lengthy, repetitive legal procedures have significant repercussions – medical consequences, feelings of helplessness, and a profound rupture in family relationships. In Alice's case, her bond with her children is severely impacted. Beyond the trauma of abuse, many victims endure the added trauma of not being believed or protected by the legal system. Justice, in these cases, becomes a place where wounds are continually reopened.

The presumption of innocence is a fundamental principle, but it can raise particular tensions in the context of domestic violence. How did you explore this dimension in the film while maintaining a balanced narrative and ethical approach?

It was never our intention to create a film where the suspense revolves around determining who is guilty and who is innocent. We fully respect the importance of the presumption of innocence. Instead, we focused on another critical tension: in cases involving the word of children, shouldn't the precautionary principle take precedence?



Children, unlike adults, cannot sustain complex, coherent lies over an extended period. With this in mind, a fundamental question arises: what is more serious – taking a small risk of being wrong about an adult's guilt or exposing a child to the much greater risk of enduring abuse or sexual violence?

The film invites viewers to reflect on this dilemma and to reconsider the place we give to children's voices in our society. Shouldn't we be more willing to believe and protect them, especially when their courage in speaking out is already immense?

Why take the gamble of shooting the 55-minute central scene in real time?

This choice stemmed from several considerations. First, we wanted the actors to experience the immediacy of a real-life hearing, where there's only one chance to present yourself. This approach allowed the actors to perform with intensity, reacting spontaneously to the unknown. For the lawyers, who had never acted in front of the camera before, it avoided repetitive retakes. Our tight budget and schedule were also factors: shooting the central scene in one continuous take with three cameras enabled us to complete the entire film in just 13 days.

The film was made on a shoestring budget thanks to the support of the Belgian Film and Audiovisual Centre as part of its assistance to light productions. What challenges and opportunities did this approach bring to the production?

This support allowed us to finance the film even before the script was fully written, based solely on a developed synopsis and a basic dossier. This was an incredible opportunity for first-time filmmakers, as it bypassed the often lengthy and challenging process of convincing advisory boards with a completed script. Early support like this enabled us to launch the project quickly.

However, the major challenge was meeting the tight timeline required by the Centre du Cinéma, which gave us just two years to write, direct, and deliver the film. This was particularly demanding when it came to securing additional funding, as traditional organizations aren't equipped for such accelerated schedules.

At the same time, the urgency created a dynamic and stimulating experience. For once, we felt like we were chasing the train instead of waiting for it to arrive.

This sense of immediacy injected energy into the creative process, and it also influenced practical decisions, such as shooting with natural light. By keeping our schedule short and shooting the central scene in one continuous take, we simplified lighting setups and were able to complete production in just 13 days.

How did you prepare to achieve this intensity and authenticity?

During casting, we realized the dynamic between professional and non-professional actors worked extremely well. For the courtroom scene, we treated the filming process as if it were a real hearing. We organized improvisation sessions between the lawyers and actors to help them build authentic relationships and develop their arguments.

At the same time, we kept Myriem and Laurent apart to create genuine distance between their characters. The professional actors meticulously studied their lines, while the lawyers prepared as they would for an actual hearing. This dual approach allowed each performer to bring their unique expertise to their role.



As a director duo, male and female, how did your visions and approaches enrich each other to handle such a delicate subject so aptly?

Being a male-female directing duo was a key strength in approaching such a complex subject. Together, we could share perspectives, discuss ideas in depth, and process the powerful testimonies we encountered. Attending court hearings together was particularly enlightening, and the discussions that followed shaped our approach. Our collaboration was grounded in constant reflection, which helped us navigate the delicate balance of the subject matter.

Why did you choose to work with real lawyers?

We knew working with real lawyers would save time while enhancing the authenticity of the film. They already understood the nuances of legal language, courtroom dynamics, and the emotional weight of their roles. Their improvisations during casting confirmed this was the right choice – their interactions with the actors felt natural and deeply credible.



How did the actors react to this choice?

Both professional and non-professional actors embraced the collaboration enthusiastically. The actors admired the lawyers' eloquence and spontaneity, while the lawyers were impressed by the actors' mastery of emotion and text. This mutual respect created a rich and rewarding dynamic on set.

What struck you about this confrontation between actors and lawyers?

We were struck by how naturally this collaboration unfolded. Lawyers, like actors, often perform a role and pursue a precise objective. Realizing these parallels was exhilarating – it highlighted how much representation and persuasion are intrinsic to both professions.

The film focuses on Alice's perspective. How did you capture the nuance and depth of her struggles?

We shared detailed testimonies with Myriem to inform her portrayal of Alice. Physically, we worked on her movements and behavior, inspired by her idea of a "mother wolf". Internally, we relied on prolonged close-ups and listening shots to convey her silent suffering. For her climactic monologue, Myriem prepared thoroughly but approached each take with openness, allowing us to explore different emotional nuances.

How did Laurent Capelluto react to the father character you suggested? How did he approach the role, and how much leeway did he have?

For Laurent, accepting this role was neither easy nor obvious. As a man, embodying such a character in the current climate of heightened awareness around sexual assault was challenging.

What convinced him was the scene where the father realizes the impact of his actions through his inability to give presents to his children – it was a turning point for him. Laurent asked many questions about the character: what exactly had this man done? What were his reasons? What beliefs or justifications did he construct for himself?

We suggested he approach the role as if he believed in his innocence, which made his performance more authentic and powerful.

Natali Broods plays the judge. How did you work with her to reflect her character's challenges and responsibilities?

We had extensive discussions with Natali about the juvenile judges we encountered during our research. She was particularly attentive to portraying the importance of listening, creating space for emotions, and gently reframing outbursts. Natali didn't want to reduce the judge to a functional role, and to prepare, she read *Défendre les enfants* by Judge Édouard Durand.

She also observed court hearings and met with a judge, which helped her understand the subtleties of the gestures, tone, and words used. Natali worked meticulously on her dialogue, ensuring each word carried the weight of the judge's authority and empathy.



How did you go about working with the children? How did you handle such a sensitive subject while preserving their well-being?

With Adèle, who plays Lila, we approached her work much like we did with the adults, but with an emphasis on creating a bond of trust and complicity with Ulysse, played by Etienne. We encouraged them to play games together to foster a natural connection, and we made Adèle the driving force in their scenes so Ulysse only needed to react to what was happening. For Ulysse, we approached acting as a game. Each take had a specific objective for him to achieve, using only the words and gestures we indicated. He wasn't asked to study his script in advance; instead, we explained the scene and dialogue to him just before filming.

At one point during preparation, Ulysse asked us an essential question: "what did the father do?". We realized how important it was for him to understand, so we explained it in a way appropriate to his age.



Children have an incredible capacity to understand, and there are tools—like Mai-Lan Chapiron’s book *The Wolf* and its accompanying prevention video – that helped guide us. It’s often adults who are more hesitant to talk about these topics. Once we answered his questions openly, Ulysse seemed much more comfortable and confident in understanding what we were asking of him.

The title *We Believe You* is strong and engaging. What does this message mean to you, and what do you hope it will inspire in the viewer?

The title reflects our belief that, as adults, we have a responsibility to listen to children, take their words seriously, and protect them. When children reveal experiences of violence, it takes immense courage. If their voices are dismissed, it can erode their confidence in the adult world. In our film, Alice even admits, “At first, I didn’t believe it. It was too violent. Too unimaginable for me.” Adults often prefer to deny such realities, but this denial carries devastating consequences.

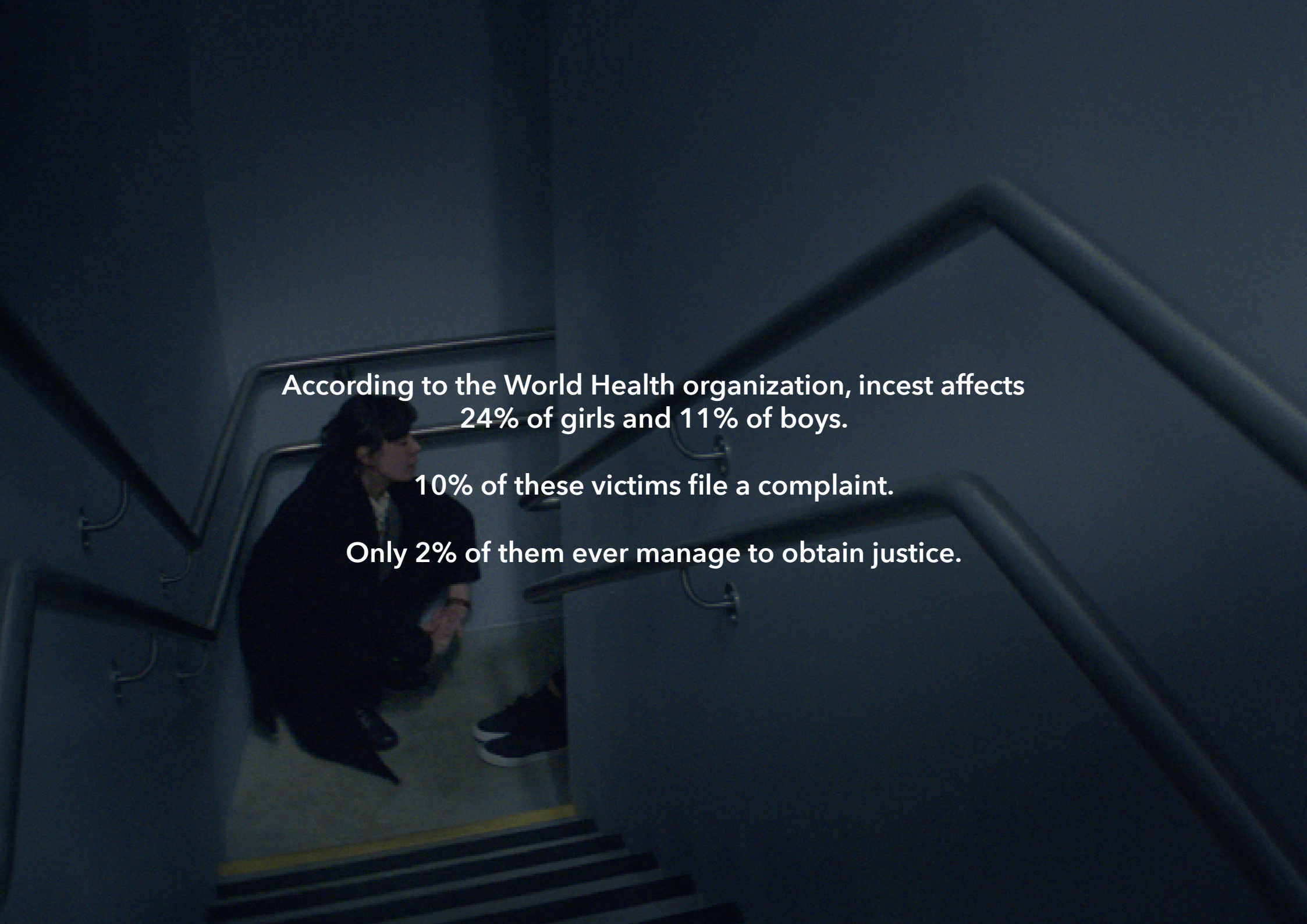
Arnaud, after presenting your short film *Invincible Summer* at the Berlinale last year, what does this new selection in the Perspectives section with *We Believe You* mean to you?

This new selection is unexpected, as I didn’t anticipate the film being ready in time. It’s a tremendous honor to return to the Berlinale, particularly with our first feature film. Beyond the recognition, it’s an incredible opportunity to share our work with audiences from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Personally, it’s a milestone in my journey as a filmmaker. The festival environment provides invaluable opportunities to engage with producers, distributors, critics, and other directors, enriching both my personal and artistic growth.

What hopes do you have for the film’s impact on society and discussions about domestic violence and justice?

Above all, we hope this film highlights the urgent need to adapt legal procedures to cases of sexual abuse involving minors. Delays in protecting a child can have lasting, devastating effects. Beyond systemic changes, we want to shift societal perceptions of victims’ families. Protecting a child often means supporting the protective parent – usually the mother—who frequently endures the brunt of systemic failures while carrying the child’s suffering.

A person is sitting on a staircase in a dark, industrial setting. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is looking down. The staircase has metal railings. The background is dark and moody.

According to the World Health organization, incest affects
24% of girls and 11% of boys.

10% of these victims file a complaint.

Only 2% of them ever manage to obtain justice.

Charlotte Devillers & Arnaud Dufeys

Charlotte Devillers and Arnaud Dufeys co-wrote and co-directed *We Believe You*. As a health-care professional who often works with victims of abuse, Charlotte helped capture some of the more intimate aspects of Youth Protection Court reality. Arnaud Dufeys, filmmaker and producer, has received international awards for his short films, including *Invincible Summer* (Berlinale 2024). They are currently developing *Plaisir*, while Arnaud is also working on two others full length features: *Faire surface* and *Les caniculaires*.



Filmography

- 2025** *We believe you* - Feature film
 Directed by Charlotte Devillers & Arnaud Dufeys
- 2024** *Invincible summer* - Short film
 Directed by Arnaud Dufeys
- 2024** *So that it never happens again*
 - Feature film
 « La mécanique du crime » documentary series
 Episode 3 Directed by Arnaud Dufeys
- 2014** *Dizziness* - Short film
 Directed by Arnaud Dufeys
- 2012** *Atoms* - Short film
 Directed by Arnaud Dufeys

Cast

Alice

The father

The judge

Etienne

Lila

Myriem Akheddiou

Laurent Capelluto

Natali Broods

Ulysse Goffin

Adèle Pinckaers

Mother's Lawyer

Father's Lawyer

Children's Lawyer

Alisa Laub

Marion de Nanteuil

Mounir Bennaoum



Credits

Directors and writers	Charlotte Devillers & Arnaud Dufeys
Producers	Arnaud Ponthière & Arnaud Dufeys
Cinematographer	Pépin Struye
Editor	Nicolas Bier
Sound Designers	Antoine Petit, Liza Thiennot & Arthur Meeus de Kemmeter
Music	Lolita Del Pino
Set Designer	Mathilde Lejeune
Costume Designer	Justine Struye
Visual Effects	Ludovic Desclin - Digital Golem



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