

# Wellbeing




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**A**shford Place held its inaugural mental health and arts festival Shout London last week.

Former *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* actress Michelle Collins, who has long been an Ashford Place patron, and presenter, model and actress Gail Porter were there to support proceedings at The Kiln Cinema in Kilburn and The Crown Hotel in Cricklewood.

The event was held two days, Monday and Tuesday, coinciding with Monday's World Mental Health Day.

Festival Director Carey Fitzgerald, who is an Ashford Place trustee, Managing Director of Silver Mountain Productions, and chair of Irish Film London, told *The Irish World*:

"Shout London really came out of an idea that I had with Danny Maher from Ashford Place.

"We were trying to think of a way we could combine my film career with all the wonderful work that Ashford Place does with health and wellbeing.

"So, we came up with this idea of the film and arts festival.

"Michelle being the fabulous patron that she is brought in a whole new dimension because she brought in all her contacts. That's how it all began."

Michelle Collins adds: "There are a lot of festivals around but how apt to have a film festival about mental health awareness and wellbeing.

"It affects all of us in our everyday life now and so it's something that we all are living with, I think, with the current climate, with Covid.

"A lot of filmmakers have also been affected by it, so they are making films that are kind of about mental health as well in a positive way - because life is about our mental health.

"It's not like a hundred years ago when people didn't talk about it and it used to be a taboo subject.

"If people can see it in films, and they can go and see it, maybe it resonates with things that are going on in their lives.

"That's what it's all about."

Michelle and Gail Porter opened the festival and Monday's events at the Kiln, and presented the opening film by Irish film-maker Adrian McCarthy, OCD & ME accompanied by a Q&A with Adrian.

There followed a screening of *I Am Gen Z* directed by Liz Smith, a documentary that explores how the digital revolution is impacting society and mental health.

Carey continued: "We've had some fantastic films and

David Hennessy was at Shout London, Ashford Place's mental health and arts festival, which took place for the first time last week



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Ashford Place is about helping to change people's lives. But we also want to change people's perceptions, and understanding of mental health and wellbeing, which of course applies to all of us. So this festival is our first attempt to really take the conversation out into the community and to the wider society.

**Ashford Place CEO  
Danny Maher**

filmmakers.

"Adrian McCarthy, who made *OCD and Me*, flew in from Dublin yesterday, and that film went down really well.

"*Generation Z* was the closing film.

"It's been brilliant, the support.

"The subject, because we all live with it, we have to normalise it.

"Hence the word 'Shout', because we have to talk about it."

Ashford Place CEO Danny Maher told *The Irish World*: "It's great, because Ashford Place is about helping to change people's lives.

"But we also want to change people's perceptions, and understanding of mental health and wellbeing, which of course applies to all of us.

"This festival is our first attempt to really take the conversation out into the community and to the wider society and encourage people, encourage all of us to start talking about mental health and to find a way of making sure that mental health is portrayed in a positive and productive way.

"As I say, it applies to all of us and particularly in these post-Covid times and cost of living crisis, we all need to look after our wellbeing and indeed support each other.

"This festival is the beginning of that conversation for us.

"If you've got mental health problems yourself, the last thing you want is people you know shying away from you or being embarrassed to talk to you.

"We want people to be mature in the way they respond to other people's mental health issues and be actually able to be somebody that can support them.

"We all have mental health issues in some way or another so it's about time, we need to talk more positively and productively and support each other."

The festival included poetry readings from Wendy Young and Janet Reeve.

They were followed by actress, writer and former Irish dancing champion, Maria McAteer performance of a scene from her hugely successful play, *The Guinness Girl*, with Karen Spicer, accompanied by Jimmy Page on acoustic guitar.

Maria told *The Irish World*: "It's been a really great experience, and it's been so inspiring, a lot of the films and a lot of the talks and the poetry.

"It's a conversation that we all have to have and it's a really, really worthwhile festival to just have those conversations.

"It's been really inspiring

Shout London festival director Carey Fitzgerald with actress and Ashford Place patron Michelle Collins  
PHOTO: MARCO DE ROSSO

MAIN PHOTO: PAUL MCPHERSON

for me. I'm really grateful to be here."

Maria struggled with identity growing up and says Irish dancing gave her a release. Her play, *The Guinness Girl*, is semi-autobiographical.

One of her uncles called her 'the Guinness Girl' because she 'was black/white, Irish and made them laugh'.

The play was lauded when it was staged at the London Irish Centre around St. Patrick's Day in 2019.

She said of the staging at last week's festival: "The reaction was really good.

"As well as talking about the play and the story itself, it does tackle Depersonalisation-Derealisation Disorder, something I suffered from as a child, but which is quite an unknown illness, actually."

Depersonalisation-Derealisation Disorder is when people persistently or repeatedly feel they are observing themselves, or have a sense that things around them aren't real. It can make people feel like they are living in a dream.

"A few people have come up and spoken to me about that.

"They were pleased that it was spoken about because not a lot of people know about it. Conversations need to be had about these things."

Maria is Irish and Trinidadian and grew up in Newcastle amid plenty of racism and anti-Irish sentiment. She says Irish dancing was her escape.

"Growing up in the '70s in Newcastle, it was quite difficult because there was a lot of hatred towards the Irish. I had an Irish mum, AND there was a lot of hatred towards people with different ethnic origins.

"Me and my mum had the full bag really, Irish dancing was kind of my saviour. It was what brought me back to myself in the depersonalisation."

Maria became an Irish dancing champion.

"I was the first brown skinned Irish dancer walking on the stage. There was a lot of 'Oh my God, what's this?'"

"These challenges are there to make us stronger. We're sent these things and if we push through them, we get there in the end. That's what the story is about really."

Was writing the play therapeutic? "Yeah, it was. *The Guinness Girl* was a play that I wrote many years ago, but it sat in a box.

"Every time I wrote a play, I wrote about everything else but *The Guinness Girl* because I had to be ready to face the things that happened.



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"It was so personal, and it wasn't until I was actually ready that I could actually bring the play out and work with it."

"So, yes, very cathartic in a lot of ways." Would you change any part of your story now? "Not a thing because there would be no Guinness Girl, there would be no stories."

"It pushed me into my creativity, so it was worthwhile in the end."

The festival included the Out & Proud photography exhibition by Peter Mirow, raising awareness of the mental health struggles of people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Peter, who has a diagnosis of Paranoid Schizophrenia, is a self-taught photographer who uses photography to raise awareness of mental health.

One of the main events on the second day, at *The Crown*, the premiere of *BeTheLight*, an 'audio-visual experience' presented by performance art group What's Going on in your Head? which was established in 2018.

It was followed by a Q&A with the group's co-founder Jon Salmon.

There followed screenings of two short films, Emma Gilbertson's *A Wake* and Dominique Murphy-de Neef's *Sanctioned*.

*A Wake* is about two grieving sisters arguing about what to do with their family's pub after their mother's death while *Sanctioned* is about how one woman chooses to present herself after being raped.

Dominique Murphy-de Neef told *The Irish World*: "It means a lot to be here tonight personally because I've struggled with mental health my entire life really, so to see a festival that's dedicated to mental health and film and the arts, which is something I've also done my entire life, is incredibly important."

"I actually haven't screened that film in a few years, but I've always felt like that film has a place."

"I'm glad that it had a place to be shown again. It was very personal to me. It is also the story of my friend Jess, who is an incredibly strong woman who was working on regaining her body after sexual trauma."

"Obviously, as a woman in the society that we unfortunately still live in today, that is something that is incredibly close to home for me and almost every single woman that I know."

"This was also done before #metoo so it was at a time where people weren't talking about sexual trauma and rape culture and all of those things."



Maria McAteer and Jimmy Page on the red carpet at the K11 (BELOW) Gail Porter in conversation with Amanda Groom PHOTOS: MARCO DE ROSSO



reported on the news. The stunt left her unable to get out of bed for weeks and she developed alopecia - her hair fell out.

Her work dried up and she found herself homeless.

She turned to a partner for help who called the police who had her sectioned for 28 days.

She was released with a full apology.

"I really enjoyed my chat, because it's taken me quite a long time to actually properly tell everyone what I went through. I used to like hiding behind a closed door. 'Don't tell anyone. It's just me'."

"Once I started opening up, more people started opening up."

"Now it's a thing that people are talking about, and listening. I always say, 'You must listen to people'."

"If you think anything is slightly strange, someone looks a bit down, talk about it, everyone listen to each other."

"Talking about everything is therapeutic, anything whatsoever."

"I still have days when I want to keep it all inside, but I know that when I talk, then I'm better."

"Yeah, I enjoyed my chat because I also laugh about a

lot of the things that I went through."

"Using humour, if you can, is really important, because I've gone through everything from bankruptcy, homelessness, sleeping on the street, to suddenly getting to chat at things like this. If I can do it, anyone can."

The festival concluded with a screening of Kim Bartley's *Schizophrenia: The Voices in my Head* documentary, which aims to remove the stigma from the condition.

The organisers hope Shout London will be a regular fixture and even grow to include events across the country and perhaps abroad.

Carey said: "The reaction's been so positive."

"We're going to put on a roadshow so not just Shout London, it can be Shout Anywhere like Shout Kosovo, for example."

"We've had interest, different countries have come back and said, 'Oh, this is amazing, can we do it?'"

"Listen - because we're going to carry on shouting."

Michelle Collins said: "Every city could have its own Shout."

Gail Porter added: "We should be having these kinds of events in every city all year round."

"At one point in the year we go to one city, have a great event, huge amounts of great talks over a couple of days and then, I was gonna say, 'Let our hair down!' everybody else is letting their hair down (but I'm not, unfortunately - and then have a proper chat with everybody, and don't feel under pressure to perform or talk."

"It's a great idea and it should be everywhere."

Maria McAteer added: "It's vitally important. It's very important. I really hope that this will grow and grow and grow."

"There's been a lot of people very moved by what they've seen. It's educational. It's inspirational. And it's an extremely important event."

Dominique said: "We want to take it around the UK. It would be amazing if we could take it worldwide one day, but the next aim is around the UK and just a bigger, better, and maybe even bolder."

Danny Maher said: "It starts here in Cricklewood, the conversation."

"We plan to roll it out across the country, and we look forward to more festivals like this across the UK and maybe even beyond."

“It’s been a really great experience, and it’s been so inspiring actually. A lot of the films and a lot of the talks and the poetry. It’s a conversation that we all have to have.”

Maria McAteer

MORE INFORMATION AT [WWW.SHOUT.LONDON](http://WWW.SHOUT.LONDON) FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ASHFORD PLACE, GO TO [ASHFORDPLACE.ORG.UK](http://ASHFORDPLACE.ORG.UK)

"The thing that I've always wanted with that film is that if it helps at least one person with their recovery, then I've done something right. So hopefully, that's what it's done today as well."

A highlight of the festival was Gail Porter and Amanda Groom at 'a fireside chat' upstairs in the Crown Hotel in which Gail spoke to an engaged crowd about her experiences of mental health.

Well-known TV presenter Gail told *The Irish World*: "Being asked to be involved with Shout London was just a wonderful, wonderful thing."

"I heard about it through Michelle Collins, because I was at an event with her and she mentioned it and she was like, 'I think you'd love this'."

"I am very proactive in talking about mental health issues, mental issues and to have an event like this has just been wonderful."

"It's very important, what they're doing. It's wonderful to be involved."

"I was lucky enough to have a wee chat this afternoon on stage."

In 1999 so-called 'lads'-mag' *FHM* projected that a 100 foot high image of a naked Gail onto the Houses of Parliament without her consent or participation.

Gail did not know about the stunt until she saw it

**Oct / Nov 2022 Events**

**THU 20 OCT**  
**IRISH HERITAGE CONCERT**  
7.30PM | £5 - £20



**SAT 22 OCT**  
**WEST OCEAN STRING QUARTET**  
8PM | £20/£18



**SAT 05 NOV**  
**CUA**  
7.30PM | £15/13



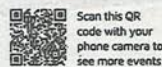
**FRI 21 OCT**  
**VICTORIA KEATING & DECLAN SINNOTT**  
8PM | £14/ £12



**FRI 28 & SAT 29 OCT**  
**TOM CREAN - ANTARCTIC EXPLORER**  
8PM | £15/£13



**WED 09 NOV**  
**AUTHOR DONAL RYAN**  
7PM | £8



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