



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

BBC PRESENTER OPENS UP ABOUT TRAUMATIC COVID-19 BIRTH EXPERIENCE

Shiona speaks on 60-hour labour and PTSD battle in a bid to get others to open up

BBC RADIO 1 Newsbeat's Shiona McCallum has spoken publically for the first time about her post traumatic stress disorder, on the day she's been unveiled as the first ambassador for See Me, Scotland's programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination.

The award-winning journalist first experienced mental health issues after a car crash in Dubai eight years ago. She hid how she was feeling for six months as she was worried about being judged by those around her, especially in work, which led to her having a breakdown.

In June, she experienced another traumatic life event which has prompted her to open up for the first time. After a 60-hour labour, her newborn son Ramsay had to be taken to a neonatal unit for oxygen as he wasn't breathing properly. Mother and child had to spend the next eight days in hospital. For the majority of this time, her husband, Michael, was banned from the hospital due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The 33-year-old Glaswegian who now lives in London said: "I was in tears for most of that time. It was an incredibly stressful, isolating experience. Not having the support of my husband gave me incredible anxiety, and it was impossible to build any rapport with the midwives because they were in full PPE. I felt completely alone.

"It was heart-breaking to be forced apart and so unnatural when you have been looking forward to becoming a family for nine months. The situation was so hideous that I started to have panic attacks and as a result ended up staying in the hospital even longer.

"After my experience in Dubai, I've worked incredibly hard to prioritise my mental health. A big part of my recovery has been because of my husband Michael who has been an incredible support to me since the day I met him. Being without him during such a stressful event made me terrified I would go back to square one. But with his support since coming out of hospital and being able to talk openly about my experience to friends and family has made me feel so much better."

The former STV and Radio Forth and Clyde reporter has also opened up about her PTSD experience to encourage people who are struggling with their mental health following lockdown and Covid-19 to ask for help.

See Me's new ambassador said: "After my car crash, I tried to get back to normal and pretend it hadn't happened. Eventually, everything boiled up to the point I couldn't cope. I just felt so low, and I cried every day. It was so unlike me. I felt ashamed and I hid it from everyone around me.

"I experienced a huge amount of guilt for feeling the way I did because I had so much to be grateful for. I thought people wouldn't accept it or they wouldn't understand, so I hid it away. But that just made things worse. I realised how scared I was of what people think. I couldn't stop thinking about it. It created a cycle of torment."

Shiona will play a key role for the charity in helping to encourage people to speak about mental health to tackle the stigma and discrimination around it. Research from See Me has revealed that 63% of people in Scotland who have experienced mental health problems themselves, think there is less of a stigma now than ever before.

Wendy Halliday, See Me director, said: "Shiona has been a great supporter of our programme for a number of years. Given what she's learned from her own experience, and her willingness to speak out and encourage others to do the same, she is the perfect See Me ambassador.

"Her experiences will be familiar to people across Scotland who are worried about telling someone how they are feeling. We all have a responsibility to change this, to create a culture where people don't have to worry. You can be part of creating this change, by joining Shiona, and ourselves in a social movement of people across Scotland, working to end mental health stigma and discrimination.

"If you're worried about someone right now, don't wait for them to say they aren't okay - ask them and show you care."

Although she originally feared opening up about how her mental health issues would negatively affect her career, she was overwhelmed by the support of colleagues and friends.

Shiona said: "When I did tell my boss, she came to see me, gave me as much time off as I needed and was very understanding. My colleagues, my friends and most of all my family were unbelievable.

"My recovery could have started sooner if I felt able to tell people. I know now it's nothing to be ashamed of, it doesn't change who I am. This is part of life.

"See Me is such an important organisation. I stigmatised myself because I was so worried about what others what think. That's exactly what they are working so hard against.

"I survived and I want to help other people. I want to make it clear that anyone can struggle from mental illness. A mental health condition doesn't make you a different person, it's just one part of you. You can still achieve amazing things and recover."

You can find out more at www.seemescotland.org.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SEE ME CONTACT:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. See Me is Scotland's National programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination, enabling people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We do this by:

- Mobilising people to work together and lead a movement to end mental health stigma and discrimination
 - Working with people to change negative behaviour towards those with mental health problems
2. Follow See Me on Twitter or Instagram @seemescotland or find us on Facebook: Facebook/seemescotland, or at www.seemescotland.org
 3. See Me is managed by SAMH and the Mental Health Foundation and funded by Scottish Government and Comic Relief

