



From left to right: Sanctuary's Director of Photography Russell Gleeson, Film Director and Northumbria senior lecturer Len Collin and actors Robert Doherty and Kieran Coppinger.

Oct 12, 2017 14:37 BST

Irish law change thanks to Northumbria director's film

A film tackling issues around sex and disability has played an important role in changing the law in Ireland.

Sanctuary highlights the Irish legal ban which made it a criminal offence for two people with intellectual disabilities (referred to as learning disabilities in the UK) to have a sexual relationship with each other unless they were married.

Directed by [Len Collin](#), Senior Lecturer in Screenwriting, Film and TV Production at Northumbria University, Newcastle, the film supported a repeal of the law. It has led to new legislation which considers the capacity someone has to consent to a sexual relationship, rather than just outlawing such relationships because they have a disability.

Sanctuary tells the story of a group of intellectually disabled people who take a day trip to the cinema with their support worker. Among them are Larry (Kieran Coppinger) and Sophie (Charlene Kelly), who long to be together and so sneak away from their friends to spend time alone in a hotel room.

The film has won critical acclaim across the world, being named Best First Film at the 28th Galway Film Fleadh, with Len Collin winning the title of Best Director at the 2017 Newport Beach Film Festival. In addition, the cast, many of whom have learning disabilities, won the Michael Dwyer Discovery Award at the Audi Dublin International Film Festival.

Len, said: “It’s not often you get the chance to work on a film that actually changes people’s lives. The film deals with the issue of inequality and the actors involved were all very aware of the legal situation. It was something they all felt passionately about and so seeing the impact the film has had and the change in the law which has resulted has been fantastic for everyone involved. I don’t think I’ll ever work on a film again that will teach me as much as I’ve learnt from working with those fine actors.”

Written by Christian O’Reilly, *Sanctuary* was originally performed as a play by the Blue Teapot Theatre Company in 2012. The film was directed by Len Collin and produced by Edwina Forkin. It was made by production company Zanzibar Films and will be distributed in the UK by Guerilla Films.

Working on *Sanctuary* has contributed towards the research for Len’s PhD, in which he explores the Representation of Intellectual Disability in scripted Film and Television Outputs.

He said: “This is an area of film I feel very strongly about and the experience of working on *Sanctuary* has shown the impact that film and television can have when it comes to instigating change. The experience will be very beneficial when it comes to my research at Northumbria University and is something I will certainly be sharing with my students.”

Sanctuary is now due to be screened at Camerimage, the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography, which takes place in Poland, as well as the Oska Bright Festival in Brighton, both held in November. It's UK theatrical run will be in December.

Northumbria's Film and TV Production BA (Hons) programme is taught by lecturers who are also current filmmakers and screenwriters, such as Len. This gives students a real insight into the industry and presents opportunities to get involved in real-life projects.

Graduates from the course include cinematographer Lol Crawley (*Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, *Four Lions*, *Utopia 2*), director Neil Marshall (*The Descent*, *Game of Thrones*) director of photography Si Bell (*Vera*, *Ripper Street*, *Fortitude*) and screenwriter Sean Conway (*Ray Donovan*, *All I See is You* directed by Marc Forster (*World War Z*)).

To find out more about Northumbria's Film and Television programmes, please click [here](#), or come along to one of our [Open Days](#).

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call 0191 227 4604.

Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk

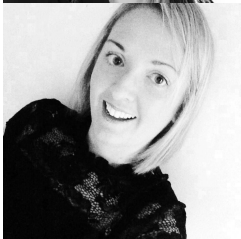


Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk