

People Speak Up Stories on Prescription

**Pilot
Project
2021-22**

Dr Tracy Breathnach



About People Speak Up

People Speak Up is an arts and health charity based in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire that delivers health and wellbeing outcomes through arts projects. In particular, their focus is on mental wellbeing, including dementia.

People Speak Up connects communities through storytelling, spoken word, creative writing and participatory arts. They offer workshops, training, events, volunteering and conversations.

Their aim is to connect people and to create healthier, cohesive, resilient communities through artistic exploration by:

- Stimulating, engaging and creating cohesive communities
- Building confidence
- Cultivating intergenerational understanding
- Promoting health and wellbeing through creative practice
- Generating workshops, performances and opportunities for individuals and communities
- Tackling loneliness and isolation
- Measuring social impact in the local and wider community
- Investigating the gaps in provision within current arts and wellbeing practices in the UK and nationally
- Providing volunteering opportunities for future employment

Theory of Change

Connecting people, making healthier, cohesive, resilient communities.

Problems

- Mental Illness
- Social Isolation
- Strain on NHS services



Referrals

Young People

Adults

- Health related trauma
- Long term mental illness

Older People

- Social isolation
- Dementia

Young People Speak Up

- Birth Cafe
- Cancer Cafe

One to one Stories

- Story Care + Share
- Intergenerational Projects
- Speak Up Pod
- Care Home Activities



Assumptions

- Continued referrals from health, social care and third sector partners.
- Continued engagement on courses; Continued commissions from partners.
- Outcomes are measured consistently and are user friendly with accessible language
- Evaluations and wider research prove effectiveness of PSU approach.

Short term outcomes

- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Alleviated loneliness
- Empowerment
- Sense of identity
- Connection

Long term outcomes

- Alleviate strain on NHS
- Dynamic, cohesive communities
- Active engagement

Evidence

- Case studies
- Volunteers
- Ambassadors
- Participant-led events and gatherings



Stories on Prescription – a pilot project

Stories on Prescription Pilot was a 6-month project that ran from October 2021– March 2022 and explored ways in which storytelling workshops can improve participants' mental health and wellbeing.

The evaluation was undertaken by Dr Tracy Breathnach in conversation with other partners and stakeholders including CAVS, Carmarthenshire United Support Project (Age Cymru Dyfed, Carers Trust, British Red Cross, Tircoed, Carmarthenshire County Council, HDdUHB), Llanelli Town Council, Swansea University: Awen Institute, Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research (CADR) & Centre for Innovative Ageing (CIA). Dr Deborah Morgan, a senior research officer within the Centre for Innovative Ageing, Swansea University provided expertise on social isolation and loneliness and advised the project on measuring loneliness and isolation.

The project activities included in this pilot were:

- **Story Care & Share** – a weekly participatory storytelling and writing workshop. These took place on zoom and hybrid delivery.
- **Stories in Care Homes** – fortnightly workshops in care homes. These took place online. Film: <https://youtu.be/2AfFEdyw9fl>
- **Stories by Phone/Door/Zoom** – 1 to 1 storytelling sessions with older people who are housebound. Film: <https://youtu.be/q7JqkUismhU>
- **Men in Conversation** – a weekly creative workshop for men using a variety of artforms including storytelling, visual arts and music. Film: <https://youtu.be/fl6CYpR9HE8>

Total attendance	Number of individuals	Total number of sessions
626	82	166

Wellbeing Outcomes: Connection, Safety, Acceptance & Expression

Connection



"If it wasn't for People Speak Up, Spoken Word Saturday, Age Cymru, I wouldn't be mentally and emotionally where I am because I've built up a community for myself of people"

Safety

"You get to know people in a very meaningful way and we all have these burdens and we don't judge each other"
"I feel safe to share my stories whatever they are that I write and also my personal worries."



Acceptance

"You have to find that well within yourself of strength and determination and to triumph over these sometimes insurmountable problems. And I'm not saying I've triumphed, but I feel that every time I have achieved something, that I have maintained some sort of mental health balance."



Creative Expression

"I do crochet, I do stuff, I'm creative, I do stuff for my own satisfaction; but I think it's the wellbeing part for me is the reaching out and connecting with other people, which for me, People Speak Up has been instrumental in achieving that. I would hate to think what life would be like without"

"I suppose it just encourages my hope and everything. Because writing poems, poems can be written for like a pastime but then you want to try to write poems to share with people to give them a life view on life."

Case Study #1 Louise

Louise has a rare brain condition and a previous support worker found People Speak Up because she knew Louise loved creativity, writing, speaking, singing and wanted to find a safe place to practise where her needs could be met. Louise describes writing, speaking, communication as an “extra thriving organ” and upon joining People Speak Up, the importance of creativity in her life became even clearer. One of the key benefits for Louise has been staying connected to People Speak Up even when she is too unwell to attend. She describes this as being given permission to be as she is:

“There have been multiple setbacks - cancer came into my life, I had womb cancer, and lots of trauma around that, and what PSU has done I feel, is all the bits in the air, feeling lost, judged, disbelieved, lots of trauma, abandonment issues ... what PSU gave me is permission to actually cry and not pretend and smile. To be comfortable in my own shoes. But also, the ability to get back to the real core me. What I’ve learned in the group is I’ve reclaimed the person in me, that’s the most important thing. And I’ve reclaimed life.”



Case Study #2 Hilary

Hilary joined Story Care and Share and Spoken Word Saturdays and regularly attended the live events until her husband became very ill, which meant that for a period of about 2 years she wasn't able to go out because she was caring for him. She stayed in contact with friends she had met at People Speak Up and attended zoom sessions when she could -

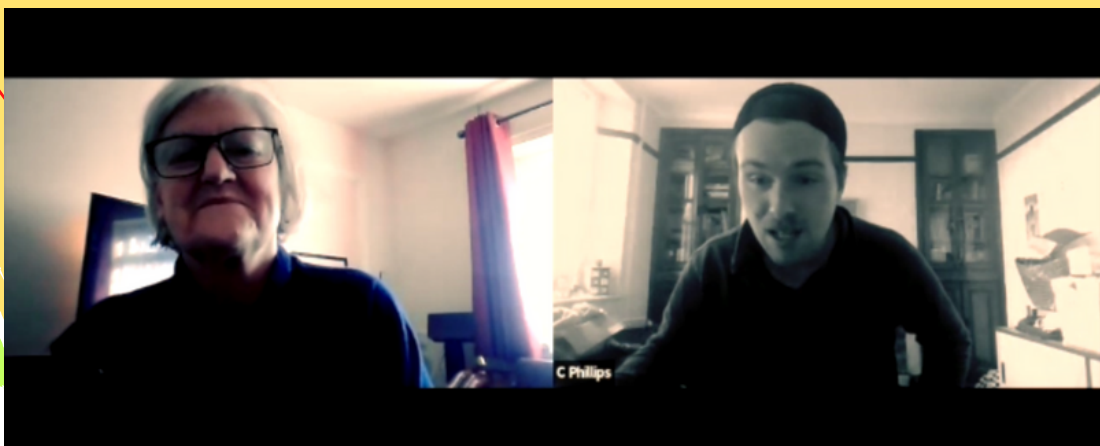
"I kept in touch with friends I'd met in Spoken Word Saturday and they were always there for me to speak to. Then my husband sadly passed away and of course it is difficult. I knew it was coming and one of the first things I wanted to go back to was Story Care and Share, which I did, and it did help me in the grieving process very very much ... Throughout my life, any problems I had I kept to myself and tried to solve them. I felt ashamed of telling people if I was down or something was awful. I never revealed myself, not even to my closest family, and then suddenly I found that everybody has these problems... It's like taking a big black overcoat off and revealing the person underneath and I found this wonderful."



Case Study #3 Mary

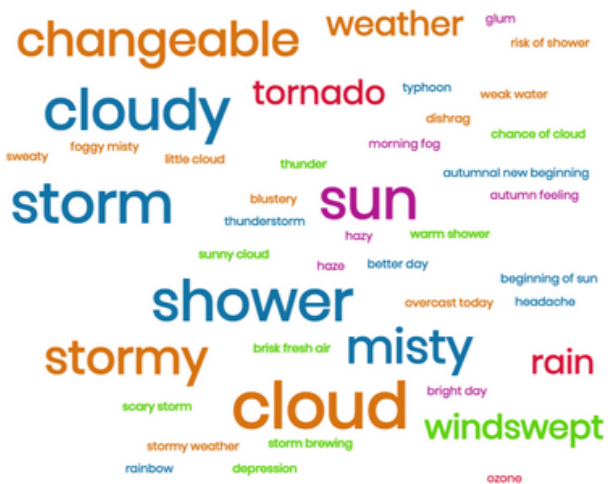
Mary contacted Age Cymru, who signposted her to People Speak Up. She was looking for some support after she had moved to the area to be closer to her grandson after her son passed away. She finds it hard to travel, not least because she has had a stroke and the whole of her left side is numb with two fingers paralysed. Five parts of her brain were damaged. She signed up for Stories by Phone and thought "what a luxury is that!" On the day of her first call, she had to make other arrangements unexpectedly, and had to go to Farm Foods:

"So, I heard my story going round Farm Foods on the phone, which was very odd! But I really enjoyed it, I enjoyed listening to someone else talk - I'm tired of hearing myself talk really because I don't have any communication with any other adults at all. It was good, it wasn't all story - we had a bit of a chat about different things that I have going on... It might have saved my life really, actually speaking to another grown up and a highly intelligent, knowledgeable grown up who was interested in and knew stuff about what I was interested in. It was a great thing, it picked me up, I was very, very low and it picked me up a lot, even having that crazy story in Farm Foods!"



Impact on Mood: From Storms to Sunny Skies

Beginning of Sessions Weather Descriptions



End of Sessions Weather Descriptions



In the group workshops there was a shift from negative, low and changeable moods as people arrived - the most common words were: cloudy, stormy, misty, showers and windswept. At the end of sessions, the majority of people felt calmer and sunnier. This indicates that the sessions not only helped to improve people's moods, but they created more cohesiveness within the groups as the mood lifted and most people felt brighter.

"My experience of attending has been entirely positive. In the spring of 2021, I found myself in a bad place in my personal life- a relationship with a long-term partner having ended...

Individuals are given a safe space to explore and express their feelings, experiences and problems through the use of story and narrative. Those attending vary in age, background, tastes and life experience; all are listened to with respect - and respect is equally extended when they feel they would prefer to say nothing - it has been inspiring to see strong bonds of affection and appreciation forged between people who come from vastly different backgrounds. In this, PSU/ Story Care & Share is surely unique.

I have found that attending has had an immensely positive and energising effect on my own life..."

-Anthony James, Participant

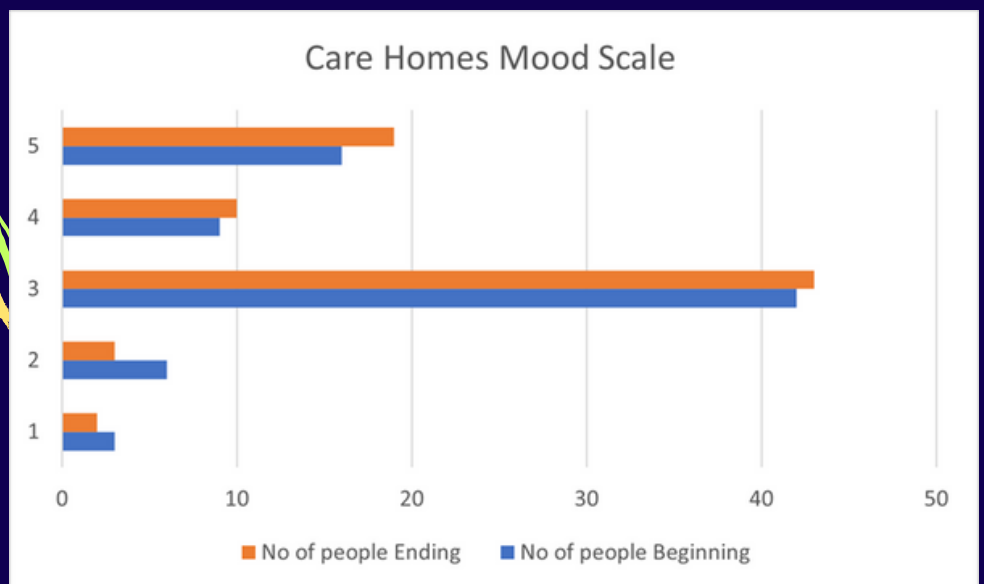


Stories in Care Homes

Overall, there was an increase in positive mood throughout the sessions. Almost 20% of participants across the project felt Great, the most positive at the end of the sessions and over 70% felt Happy (3), Very Happy (4) or Great (5), with only 3% feeling Sad (1).



- 1 = Sad
- 2 = Ok
- 3 = Happy
- 4 = Very Happy
- 5 = Great



Technology

Swansea University Awen Institute assisted with exploration of the types of technology that could be implemented to enhance the quality of experience for participants, making recommendations for purchase of equipment to improve ease of set up and improve the sound and visual experience to enable wider inclusivity. It is hoped the improved equipment can be used for further development of enhanced hybrid delivery in partnership with Swansea University Awen Institute for future projects.



“Residents enjoy their sessions with Carys and Karen from PSU, the interaction flows continuously so they are keeping the residents interested (with dementia they can be impatient and bored quickly) I can see the concentration they have when listening to a story or poem... after the storytelling sessions the residents don't want to leave the room.”

Feedback from care home staff

1 to 1 Storytelling

1 to 1 storytelling sessions were developed in response to elderly people being isolated during the pandemic. Stories were delivered by a professional storyteller over the phone, to the door or by zoom, depending on the preference of each participant. Each session was unique and bespoke to the participant and the artists delivering it. It involved stories and conversations on the themes of the stories or anything else that the participants wanted to share. It provided a lifeline for many individuals who would otherwise have had no contact with an adult throughout the week.



Outcomes



Based on the various strands of feedback received from participants, support staff and artists the main wellbeing and health benefits from Stories on Prescription are:

1. **Improved mood:** immediate impact and in some cases long-term impact
2. **More cohesion** in groups
3. **Less negative thoughts** and a greater sense of **mental balance**
4. Increased **sense of connection** with self and others
5. Increased inspiration and **sense of purpose**
6. Increased **confidence** and communication skills
7. Increased **sense of belonging** and being part of a community
8. Increased **acceptance and understanding** of own and others' needs

Partners and Funders

The project was funded by Arts Council of Wales and in partnership with the Carmarthenshire United Support Project, Swansea University Awen Institute, Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research (CADR) & Centre for Innovative Ageing (CIA).



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