Phil Okwedy (Storyteller)

Could you tell us a little bit about yourself / what life was like before you got involved in the project?

I'm a storyteller. I've been working with PSU since I first finished teaching in 2017, so getting on for 8 years now. I may have performed there before that as well. This will fourth iteration of this project, but I began traveling with Carys. It was 'stories on the door' back then, it became 'stories on the phone', then I did 18months ago here with a group of people in the village (Manorbier), and this is my first time working with Judy who is facilitating on behalf of PSU.

I came across storytelling in 2010 as a teacher and it really spoke to me. I found some way of doing some training and then went about finding some opportunities to tell. I was doing that alongside teaching but began to look at people who were earning a living doing storytelling – I certainly had that as a performance goal – then in 2017, our school offered me voluntary redundancy, and I took it. I spent that summer researching online for how to earn a living. I found myself at a storytelling and health conference in Swansea where I met Sian Elias from Gower. We were just sitting having lunch, explaining to her that I was considering leaving teaching and telling her how I was researching online, and she said: "Hm. That sound like you're using your head, but everything else you've told me is about following your heart", and it was one of those moments where I just dropped everything and trusted the universe.

How did you get involved in the project, what did you hope might happen as a result of getting involved?

I've been working with 2 individuals. Judy has tapped into a project called 'Solva Care', which is how we got participants filtered to us – via their Friday Club. I haven't been to Friday club yet, but it may be a development. Judy is a dancer, and I believe does some movement classes with them. It'd be great to go there, a chance to share some stories and have some conversations with them. That would be a great development, and a natural next step too. I think I've been struck, or felt myself pulled to ask the question – once the hour is over, the isolation returns, so

does this work? Maybe it's on me as a facilitator, because we have faced challenges in this regard, but I do wonder that if reaching more people may help.

What do you think has been the most significant change?

I think, given that it's an hour, it has been successful. I have found myself looking for an opportunity to share a story, rather than going in and share a story which provokes conversation – which is what a story is: a conversation – so that element has gone really well. They've engaged, they've enjoyed it, despite difficulties. I enjoyed it too. Tapping into larger organisations, and still have one-to-one visits, would be great.

If you were to tell other people about People Speak Up, what would you say?

They're an organisation that uses storytelling and other art forms to connect people! I'd talk about the chapel, the various groups and events that happen there, just how connected it is. I'd talk about how intergenerational it is, even though a lot of the projects aren't specifically so, a lot of generations meet there. It's such a powerful organisation, which I didn't realise when I started working with them. I've realised grow over the years from Spoken Word Saturday to all day, every day, which is wonderful.

What title would you give your story?

It's sort of been going round my head – it's been "story, care, and share", "stories on prescription, "stories to the door" – that last one is the one that stuck with me, because we were going over the threshold, and it was first. I don't know what the answer is, but it is really worth thinking about. When it's captured, when it's the right thing, it will be evident.