



# Ketamine Lived Experience Findings

Exploring personal journeys and supportive  
recovery networks



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Introduction

Presented by Jamie Barnes and Claire Woodcock



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# SULE Recovery Community Overview



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Who We Are and Our Mission



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

**together**  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

The SULE Recovery Community is a peer led , co produced project supporting people affected by substance use across Norfolk.

We empower individuals through shared lived experience, creating safe, non-judgemental spaces where people feel understood and able to speak openly.

Engagement is inclusive and accessible

Our mission is to build an inclusive recovery network that strengthens connection, belonging and influence on local services.

# Building the Evidence Base



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Peer-Led Research

- Led by a lived experience Service Manager and Peer Research Coordinator.
- Over **400** contacts across Norfolk.
- 271 one-to-one peer-led interviews completed.

## Why It Worked

- People felt able to speak openly with someone who understood their experiences.
- Peer-led approach reduced stigma, built trust and produced rich, authentic insight into what helps and what gets in the way.

## Engagement Approach

- Structured methods:
- A dedicated survey
- Targeted focus groups

# Why Focus on Ketamine



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Emerging Concern

- People consistently reported rising ketamine-related harm.
- Many described limited support, misunderstanding and delayed responses from services.
- This made ketamine a priority area for deeper lived-experience exploration.

# What We Asked



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Key Questions Explored

- Why people start using ketamine
- How use changes over time
- Physical, psychological and social harms
- Barriers to accessing healthcare and support
- Experiences with treatment services
- What people feel would genuinely help
- What recovery looks like and what makes it possible



Analysis -  
Survey responses  
and focus  
group  
discussions  
analysed  
thematically.



# Understanding Ketamine Use and Motivations



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

**together**  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Motivations for Starting Ketamine Use



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Social Environment Influence

- Ketamine use often begins in social settings like raves and festivals where it is normalised among peers.

## Peer and Partner Encouragement

- Friends and intimate partners play a crucial role in encouraging early use and reinforcing consumption habits.

## Sense of Belonging

- Normalisation reduces perceived risk and creates a strong sense of belonging within social groups.

## Need for Harm Reduction

- Understanding social factors highlights the need for targeted interventions and safer social spaces.

# Impact Quotes



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Changes in Motivation Over Time

## Early Motivation for Use

- Initial ketamine use often provides escape, euphoria, or companionship but can lead to dependency.

## Diminished Motivation and Neglect

- As dependency grows, motivation declines with neglect of basic daily activities and social connections.

## Pivotal Turning Points

- Critical life events disrupt using cycles, prompting a desire for recovery and structure.

## Challenges in Sustained Recovery

- Relapse is common due to physical decline, stigma, and inconsistent support, requiring empathetic services.



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Impact Quotes



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Support Needs and Service Gaps



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Support Needs Identified by Participants

## Informed Healthcare Professionals

- Better knowledge among healthcare providers about ketamine harms improves treatment and referral accuracy.

## Empathetic Peer Support

- Nonjudgmental peer support offers emotional grounding and strengthens community resilience for recovery.

## Consistent Support Workers

- Stable support worker relationships prevent re-traumatisation and encourage ongoing engagement in care.

## Early Intervention Education

- School-based education is key for early prevention and reducing ketamine misuse among youth.



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Impact Quote's



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Gaps in Services and Barriers to Access



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Healthcare Knowledge Gaps

- Many healthcare providers lack understanding of ketamine-related harms, leading to missed diagnoses and delayed referrals.

## Fragmented Aftercare Services

- Support often reduces after initial recovery, causing patients to downplay progress to retain essential care.

## Impact of Stigma

- Stigma leads to denial of adequate pain management and discourages help-seeking among affected individuals.

## Delays in Referral

- Long waits for specialist referrals leave urgent medical needs unmet and worsen patient outcomes.

# Impact Quote's



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Health, Social Harms, and Daily Life Impact



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Health and Social Harms



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Physical Health Harms

- Ketamine use causes severe physical issues including bladder damage, kidney and liver problems, and chronic pain needing medical care.

## Gradual Symptom Onset

- Physical decline from ketamine is gradual, often delaying recognition and treatment of symptoms by users.

## Social and Psychological Harms

- Users experience isolation, risky behaviours, emotional numbness, and stigma from social networks and healthcare providers.

## Need for Early Intervention

- Early detection and integrated support systems are essential to prevent irreversible harms from ketamine use.

# Impact Quote's



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Impacts on Daily Life Functioning



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Disrupted Daily Functioning

- Heavy ketamine use caused physical decline, pain, and incontinence, making some individuals housebound or bedbound.

## Neglected Self-Care

- Participants experienced worsening hygiene and nutrition due to lack of energy and hydration neglect.

## Social Isolation and Shame

- Shame and secrecy led to social isolation, loss of routine, and deteriorated mental health.

## Need for Support Systems

- Robust aftercare, psychological services, and practical support are vital for recovery and managing ketamine harm.

# Impact Quote's



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# Recovery Approaches and What Works



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

# Effective Support Approaches



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

## Small Support Groups

- Small groups foster trust and privacy, enabling deeper conversations without fear of judgement.

## Peer-Driven Recovery Models

- Peer-driven models offer warmth and lived-experience knowledge that create a safe environment for change.

## Internal Motivation and Behavioural Change

- Lasting recovery depends on personal commitment and often requires distancing from using peers to avoid relapse.

## Empathetic, Trauma-Informed Support

- Structured peer support, trauma-informed facilitation, and consistent workers empower sustained recovery and skill-building.

# Impact Quote's



**NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY**

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



# In Summary

Ketamine-related harm is increasing, and the impact on people's health, relationships, and daily functioning is often severe.

Support is inconsistent, and understanding among healthcare professionals is limited, which leads to delays and missed opportunities for intervention.

People want informed professionals, consistent workers, and safe peer-led spaces where they feel understood.

Recovery is absolutely possible, and it is most successful when services are empathetic, trauma-informed, and shaped collaboratively with lived experience.



NORFOLK RECOVERY  
COMMUNITY

together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING