



April 2025 – March 2026

Ketamine

Raising awareness. Supporting change.
Collaborating to reduce harm.

withyou

wearewithyou.org.uk

A growing national challenge



Ketamine use has emerged as one of the fastest-growing substance-related harms affecting children, young people, and adults across the UK.

Once perceived as an 'after party drug', ketamine is now presenting significant risks to physical health, particularly bladder and urological damage, as well as mental wellbeing, safeguarding, and long-term dependency.

There is currently no good-quality published evidence on how best to manage illicit ketamine use.

This impact report brings together the learning, progress, and lived experiences that have shaped our work over the past year. Working alongside health services, criminal justice, academic institutions, local authorities, and community organisations, we have built a shared foundation of knowledge that is helping the sector respond more confidently and more effectively.

Together, we are developing clearer pathways, improving early identification, and ensuring that treatment is grounded in evidence as well as empathy.

This year, we have invested in specialist training, expanded our harm reduction outreach, and deepened our understanding of ketamine-related bladder health, mental wellbeing, and dependency patterns. We have listened closely to the people we support, whose insights continue to shape our practice and challenge us to do better.

Substances and use are changing, and so are we. By sharing our learning openly, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to innovate, we are helping to build a future where support is informed, accessible, and responsive to real-world needs.

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, partners, and the people who have shared their stories with us. Your commitment and collaboration are the driving force behind every insight and every impact captured in these pages.

Kate Blazey
Executive Medical Director
withyou

WithYou data from 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026

Our impact at a glance

Nationally, WithYou received

833

referrals related to ketamine use.

526

of those were under 25 years.

WithYou's webchat hosted

377

conversations where ketamine was mentioned.

National social media channels shared 9 ketamine-related posts

which reached

210,248 people

and received a total of

1,276 likes, shares and comments

Our ketamine webpage was viewed

1,567 times

We generated over

80 pieces of ketamine-related media coverage since September 2025

WithYou in Lancashire received the most referrals under 25 years of age.

WithYou in Cornwall had the highest number of referrals over the age of 25.

Service spotlights

Trusted expert voices

In 2025 WithYou in Lancashire developed an educational film for 3,500 officers at **Lancashire Constabulary** which is now embedded within their mandatory training.

Focus areas of the training included:

- Effects of ketamine on behaviour and cognition
- Recognising and safely managing 'k-holes'
- Supporting and safeguarding young people

WithYou in Lancashire delivered national webinars to **over 1,000** people and professionals via: "Let's Talk Ketamine".

Our **Shropshire** service worked in partnership with the local authority to provide training to 167 professionals across the region covering how and why people use ketamine, health risks and complications, and treatment pathways and options.



The BBC published its investigation into the growing number of young people accessing drug and alcohol services in 2024–25. **WithYou were invited** to contribute expert comment.

WithYou teams have spoken at **local, regional and national events** specifically related to ketamine use.

WithYou in Kent helped reach, train and educate **over 1,500 professionals, and over 2,000 young people**

National Community Engagement Awards



Strength in collaboration

Key achievements:

- ✓ Kent reached over **2,000** young people
- ✓ Shropshire trained **167** professionals
- ✓ Redcar & Cleveland educated over **370** students
- ✓ Lancashire visited over **30** schools
- ✓ Darlington delivered awareness to over **1,000** students including neurodiverse audiences.

Campaigning

In December 2025, WithYou supported a multi-agency ketamine campaign with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Dorset Council, Dorset Police, EDAS and Reach called **#ForgetTheKet**.

Across Humberside, early intervention has been a priority for providers and community partners. Multi-agency task groups including WithYou staff were launched in late 2025 to deliver the first regional ketamine campaign during 2026.

In partnership with WithYou, Lancashire Constabulary's Operation Shore **won the award** for Outstanding Use of Neighbourhood Alert and Partnership Working. It was showcased as a model of good practice to senior leaders from police forces and government organisations across the country.

Education and early intervention

WithYou and partners were invited into schools and colleges nationwide to reach young people.



Your visit has made a genuine difference, and we are truly grateful." Burnley College

Influencing pathways

We worked with South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to establish a **regional pathway** linking James Cook University Hospital urology services directly into community drug support.

Key features:

- Automatic offer of referral when ketamine use is identified
- All North East referrals routed through Redcar's Young People's Team
- Consent-based transfer to local services
- Promotion of virtual support options
- Educational posters displayed in urology departments

[WithYou in Darlington at STRIDE](#)

delivered ketamine-focused training to the Urology Department at Darlington Memorial Hospital, increasing clinical awareness of ketamine bladder syndrome and **strengthening referral pathways** into community support.



WithYou as part of [CDAS](#) developed a **ketamine-specific clinical pathway**, including:

- Nurse-led assessment using the Pelvic Pain, Urgency, and Frequency questionnaire
- Fast-track GP and urology referrals
- Reciprocal referrals from urology into drug services
- Plans to extend the model to the Staffordshire Treatment and Recovery Service

Reducing harm

We have supported and responded to local and regional **alerts** of contaminated ketamine alongside partners. Clinical alert posters, social media content and printed materials have been developed to support community services.

WithYou responded to **15 ketamine-related clinical alerts** and carried out community pharmacy events to offer bespoke training

Living experience at the heart

Meet Tom. In March 2024, after six years of ketamine use, he was told his bladder, kidneys and liver were functioning at just 20%. Doctors warned him that he would die if he kept taking the drug.

Through WithYou's support, he secured three months in rehab, and then began attending group sessions at partner organisation in North Lincolnshire, Double Impact.



Ketamine was this escapism, it was escapism from reality. And I feel like that's a big thing for people, especially people with poor mental health, it takes them away from the world they're in."

Tom now works for the Scunthorpe Recovery Service, runs a weekly ketamine group, and contributes to both local council research and national events.

He has shared his story with regional and national media, and is proud to talk about his experiences. As a result, more people have come forward for help.



Recovery is far from easy. That's why these groups are so good - these people have the same goals but come from completely different backgrounds."



Tom Kirk, previous client of WithYou in North Lincolnshire

Increasing reach: reducing stigma

Since September 2025, WithYou generated **over 80** pieces of ketamine-related media coverage, reaching a potential **1.4 billion** people nationally and regionally.

This includes:

- **The Sun (Scottish Sun, and Irish Sun):** Former client Tom's story and WithYou data reached a potential 90m+
- **Forget the Ket (Dorset):** Regional and national campaign coverage reached a potential 117m
- **Daily Mail and Sunday Times:** Parent-focused guidance reached a potential 233m+
- **BBC (Look North, Radio Lincolnshire, Radio Humberside, News Online):** Broadcast reach of a potential 1m+
- **BBC Radio 4's File on 4:** Director of pharmacy interview reached a potential of 10m+ listeners
- **LBC:** Clinical experts quoted on ketamine reclassification

- Local coverage in Burnley, Lancashire, Teesside, and Darlington on early intervention and school-based work
- **ITV West:** WithYou in Cornwall expert voice on reclassification.

WithYou joined the Drugs, Alcohol & Justice All-Party Parliamentary Group alongside the Transform Drug Policy Foundation to explore the latest ketamine trends, what a public health-led response should look like, and the significance of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' recommendation against reclassifying ketamine from Class B to Class A.

Grace Willsher, Regional Head of Young People's Services, says:

"Evidence-led prevention, early intervention and accessible treatment must sit at the centre of any effective response."





Meeting people where they are

Kev Hobin has worked in the substance misuse sector for 26 years, now serving as a team leader at WithYou in Wigan and Leigh. Shaped by growing up in St Helens during the 1990s heroin crisis, his passion for the work has never wavered.

He has seen the consequences of stigma throughout his career, and it informs everything about how he works, particularly as ketamine becomes an increasing concern.

Recognising that ketamine's physical effects, including severe bladder damage, can make leaving the house impossible, Kev set up an online support group built around the barriers people face. No referral is needed, cameras are optional, and it runs in the early evening so those who work can attend.



If someone needs the toilet every five minutes, they're not getting the bus. They're not sitting in a waiting room. So we needed to stop expecting them to."

His vision is for the group to become a peer-led space rooted in lived experience. But the moments that stay with him are simpler: a client doing something they never thought they could again.



The milestones that stay with me now are the ones where someone is doing something they didn't think they could do anymore.

Getting a little bit of their life back. That's what this work is really about."

Kev Hobin, Team Leader, WithYou in Wigan and Leigh

Real outcomes and **change**

WithYou is proud to have worked alongside our partners, clients and community to:

- Increase national **awareness** of ketamine use among young people, parents, and professionals
- Support **safer**, more informed police and partner responses
- Improve **clinical** recognition of ketamine-related harm
- Encourage more young people to access timely support free from stigma
- Build stronger regional **pathways** between health, justice and community services
- Support people with living experience of ketamine use to be at the heart of **change**



We believe that to reduce ketamine harm, our focus must be on prevention, early identification and access to support services, and not further criminalisation.

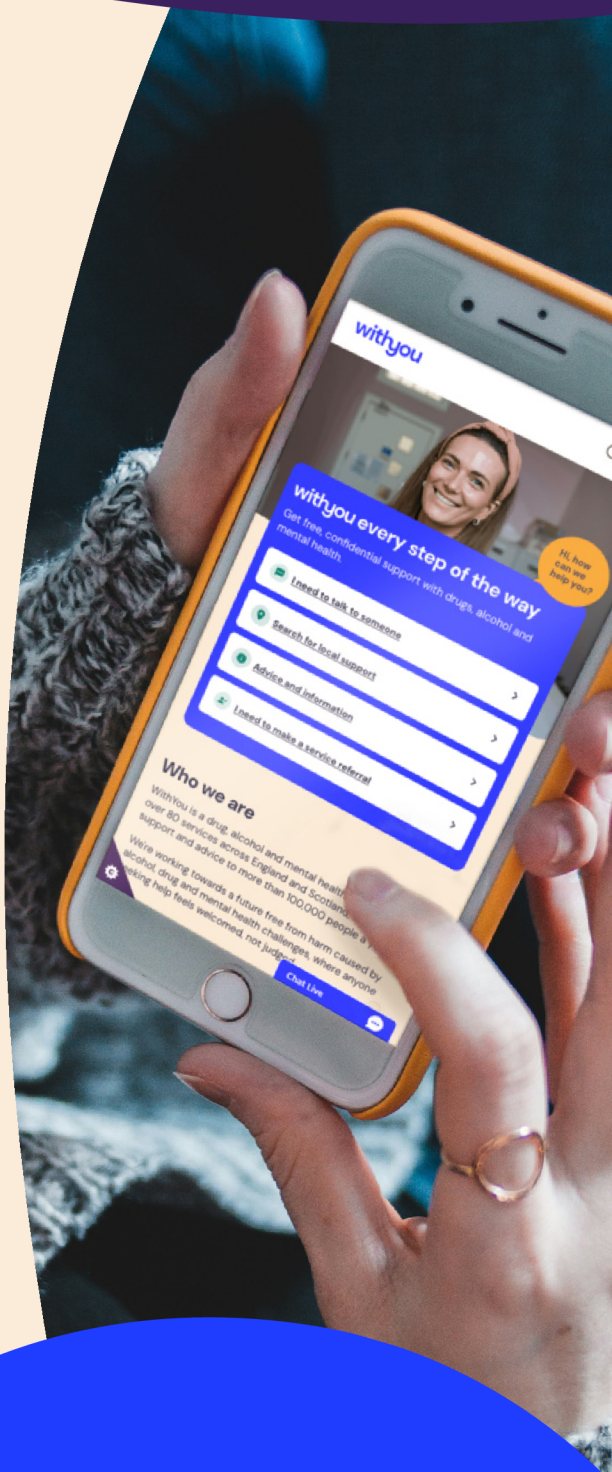
This means investing in education, strengthening local treatment pathways, and ensuring that young people feel safe to ask for help."

Gary Hales, Team Leader, WithYou in Cornwall

Next steps

Looking ahead, our focus is on turning insight into action and driving meaningful change:

- **New approach and service model:** we're committed to developing a framework that reflects the emerging patterns of ketamine use and the complex needs of the people affected.
- **Bespoke detox pathways:** this includes strengthening specialist CQC and Ofsted registered provision for under-18s in residential settings, ensuring young people receive safe, tailored and age-appropriate support.
- **Joined-up strategic response across local systems:** we will continue working with partners across local authority health and care systems — including general practice, pain management, urology, and young people's services — to ensure a coordinated, whole-system approach.
- **Building on the foundations laid by funding:** DATRIG has opened the door to increased referrals; the next step is designing sustainable pathways that support individuals long-term, not just at crisis points.
- **Broader collaboration:** we'll keep working alongside key agencies and engaging with policing, other statutory partners, and the media to raise awareness, shape responses and drive collective action.



More children and young people are asking for help than ever before — WithYou is there to support them.”

Jennifer Rushworth-Claeys,
WithYou Director of Services
for Young People

Raising **awareness.**

Supporting **change.**

Collaborating to
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To learn more about our services, visit
wearewithyou.org.uk

withyou

WithYou is a charity registered in Scotland (SC040009) and in England and Wales (1001957).