

May 26<sup>th</sup> 2016

## **EXPERT NORFOLK SUBSTANCE RECOVERY CHARITY**

### **STATEMENT ON PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES BAN**

The Matthew Project – experts in substance misuse and recovery – says it welcomes activity that educates people as to the harm caused by psychoactive substances and reduces availability.

*Paul Martin, CEO of the Matthew Project said,*

Many young people and adults say they were unaware of the potential dangers posed by these substances prior to coming to us for help. They often have exciting names and packaging – hiding what they really are. We hope the ban indicates the harms to potential users.

Up to now young people and adults have often thought that what is legal must be safe – this is not the case and this legislation helps to label these drugs as harmful so beware.

As always, we remain alert to people's needs because it is predictable that the supply of these substances will continue in some illegal way, as it does with others.

We are always ready to help anyone who wants to talk to us about any form of substance misuse. This includes the families of those with a drug or alcohol issue. Call 01603 262123.

*Cheap – and harmful*

Before the ban, young people have felt that these substances are both accessible in shops and half the price of cannabis. But their 'legal' status could be misleading.

“We know these substances harm people in the short term. For example, we hear about negative experiences such as a racing heart, hallucinations, blacking out, vomiting and even death. The effects are so unpredictable. Some young people experience a strong compulsion to use even after using for a relatively short time, feeling unable to stop and feeling addicted. We simply do not have the evidence of the effects of long term use.

“For context, it's worth noting we expect to continue to help a far greater number of people who have problems with alcohol – a legitimate substance. We're here if anyone wants advice and help.”

*What our clients say:*

- NPS made up between 4% and 8% pc of Unity’s (young people’s service) drugs in 2015
- Our clients are aware of the impending legislation and it has been a mixed response
- Some are very keen to stop their use and we are supporting them around this
- Research in the *Independent* said 64% of users will look to continue to purchase and consume psychoactive substances after the ban

### Useful background and definitions

#### **Psychoactive Substances Act**

The Psychoactive Substances Act comes into force on 26 May 2016. The Act makes it illegal to produce, supply, import or export any psychoactive substance that is likely to be used to get high.

The Act aims to stop the sale and importation of psychoactive substances by making supply and importation illegal - including website sales. If someone buys a psychoactive substance from a website abroad, they could be prosecuted for importation.

Under the Act it is not illegal to possess a psychoactive substance (not covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act) unless you intend to supply it to others or are in a custodial institution.

#### **The term ‘supply’**

When the law refers to the [supply](#) of drugs, this includes giving drugs to someone else – even if that person is your friend and they didn’t pay you for it, offering to supply drugs to someone, being involved with the supply of drugs to someone. Supplying ‘legal highs’ is now illegal.

#### **Legal high**

The term ‘legal high’ is commonly used to describe new psychoactive substances (NPS) but it is misleading. Many ‘legal highs’ e.g. types of synthetic cannabinoids, are already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act, which now specifies particular drugs and also groups of drugs (e.g. synthetic cannabinoids that impact on specific receptors in the brain). Some products sold as ‘legal highs’ contain multiple NPS and many contain illegal or banned substances.

#### **Psychoactive substance**

The [Psychoactive Substances Act](#) defines a psychoactive substance as follows:

“Any substance which—

(a) is capable of producing a psychoactive effect in a person who consumes it, and

(b) is not an exempted substance (eg used for medical research)

For the purposes of this Act a substance produces a psychoactive effect in a person if, by stimulating or depressing the person’s central nervous system, it affects the person’s mental functioning or emotional state; and references to a substance’s psychoactive effects are to be read accordingly.”

**Ends**