

Vancouver harm reduction group provides naloxone training and drug-use education

Karmik offers stigma-free approach to ketamine, condoms and concerts

John Kurucz / Vancouver Courier

MARCH 14, 2017 10:27 AM



Munroe Craig is the co-founder of Karmik, a Downtown Eastside harm reduction group that offers services ranging from naloxone training to educating music festival goers about the drugs they might ingest. Photo Dan Toulgoet

Munroe Craig's notion of proactive party planning includes hypodermic needles and test kits that gauge the purity of cocaine, ketamine and other illicit drugs.

Craig is the co-founder of Karmik, a Downtown Eastside harm reduction group that offers services ranging from naloxone training to educating music festival goers about the drugs they might ingest.

The group operates on a premise of total non-judgement, and instead focuses on the real-world ramifications of drug use, sexuality and party culture.

"What gets me through every day is quite honestly every single person who has died — and I've had a lot of people die in my life," she told the Courier. "That doesn't make it easier, it just makes it more familiar."

Craig grew up around the off-the-beaten-path festival circuit in Ontario, both as an attendee and a DJ. Her professional background includes a bachelor's degree in health sciences with a major in addictions, along with a substance-use counsellor diploma. Outside of her work with Karmik, Craig is an addiction counsellor by trade with RainCity Housing and other frontline organizations in the DTES.

Established in 2014, Karmik marries Craig's concert experiences from the past with present-day healthcare realities. The bulk of Karmik's work and funding comes from attending concerts and festivals across B.C., including the hugely-popular Pemberton Music Festival.

Karmik volunteers distribute educational literature around drugs, dosages and the expected effects, contraceptives and drug-testing kits at those gigs. Party packs are handed out that include “pragmatic harm reduction supplies”: clean straws, condoms and lubricant, among other items.

A passive space is also provided for attendees to assess their physical and mental faculties. Referred to as a “sanctuary” or “chill zone,” those settings are manned by trained harm-reduction volunteers and include art, colouring books and other props to help create a welcoming atmosphere.

“It’s a place where people can come and re-collect, whether it’s from adverse effects from substance use or challenges related to consent,” Craig said. “Or it’s simply a place to come to seek rest and a break, which is part of safe care. If people are needing to use any substances, we give them a safer way to cut down on the risk.”

Once outdoor festival season wraps up, Karmik turns the bulk of its attention to naloxone training and other harm-reduction initiatives in Vancouver. Many of Karmik’s volunteers work at the Overdose Prevention Society’s site on East Hastings Street. Those volunteers undergo a screening process before receiving their training, which is offered three times a year. As part of that training, Karmik receives its naloxone kits free of charge from the B.C. Centre for Disease Control and the Towards the Heart Program.

Karmik’s training courses last about 20 hours and are geared towards those under the age of 30. Volunteers are given naloxone kits once their training wraps up.