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# Opening minds

## Ketamine therapy takes root locally amid mental health crisis

story and photos by  
**Evan Tuchinsky**

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**A**lexandra Kriz felt she had to do something. As the pandemic dragged into its second year, the Chicoan found her community in the throes of a mental health crisis triggered by a string of countywide traumas—from the Oroville Dam spillway disaster to deadly wildfires—exacerbated by coronavirus restrictions in an area where residents already grapple with effects of state-leading levels of adverse childhood experiences (or ACEs). She found herself particularly concerned after reading about a rise in suicides and suicidal thoughts in young people (see “Kids in crisis,” News, March 9,

2021)—including students (and a teacher) at Chico High.

Kriz, who battled post-traumatic stress after serving in the U.S. Army, told the CN&R she’s been “screaming from the rooftops” since the Camp Fire “that we need to have a comprehensive solution to treat mass-scale trauma in our community. As a veteran who was sexually assaulted, I know what it feels like to live with untreated trauma and the chaos it brings, the suffering and the fallout that inevitably occurs when you’re living in that space.

“One of the factors in that [comprehensive solution] was using psychedelic therapy because of its efficacy in treating things such as treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, anxiety [and] suicidal ideation.”

The psychedelic therapy in question involves the use of ketamine. Though stigmatized by its use as a recreational drug, it has a long history as an anesthetic and ranks among the World Health Organization’s essential medicines. Medical practitioners have expanded the administration of ketamine to alleviate pain as well address opiate addiction and psychiatric conditions, with studies confirming effectiveness and safety.

Kriz and her partner, vibrational-sound therapist Jesse Spallina, teamed up with an integrative medicine physician from the Bay Area, Dr. Daniel Rieders, to offer ketamine injections in Chico. The result is Phoenix Nest Community Project, a nonprofit collaborative opened last year and encompassing a range of holistic healing.