



# Irony and injustice



In this TEDx Talk, filmed a few days after cannabis was legalized in Canada, **Dr. Akwasi Owusu-Bempah** shares his insights on the people impacted most by prohibition. He also talks about how legalization can be used to promote positive economic and social change.

## Activity steps

1. Ask what participants know about cannabis legalization. Have a brief discussion.
2. Watch the [Untapped promise of cannabis legalization](#) video.
3. Walk through the handout.
4. In pairs or small groups, reflect on the questions below.

## Take it a step further!

- Challenge the youth to plan a campaign for bringing the three calls for action to life.
- Use the Social determinants of health tool as a lens for understanding Darrel and Ryan's stories.

## Reflect and discuss

- How did you feel watching the video? What stood out most for you? Why?
- Consider the factors that contributed to Darrel's criminal record and its aftermath. How would you summarize his story?
- Consider the factors that contributed to Ryan's release from the police without a record and the birth of New Life Cannabis. How would you summarize his story?
- Cannabillionaire" is a new term for a new phenomenon. In your opinion, does the term have a positive or negative connotation? Explain your answer.
- Owusu-Bempah says he was bored and disruptive when he was in high school, leading to consequences and revelations:

*"I spent more time in the principal's office and hallway than I care to admit. But these experiences taught me an important lesson. I got to see the profound influence individual teachers, and the schools and institutions, can have over the lives of young people. While some of us were suspended or expelled for acting out, similar behaviour from other students was largely ignored."*



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- a. Have you ever had an experience that taught you an important lesson? If so, explain.
  - b. In what ways did the experience influence your thinking, behaviour and choices?
- Owusu-Bempah points to two related ironies in our society: people with cannabis convictions can't get jobs in the legal cannabis market, and our criminal justice system is unjust.
    - a. What are other examples of irony in our society?
    - b. Why are they important to you?
  - Owusu-Bempah quotes lines from a Tupac Shakur song to summarize how race and socio-economic status are key to who gets stopped by police, who's convicted in our courts, and who is sent to our prisons.
    - a. What other song lyrics do you know that reflect inequality in our laws or other social injustices?
    - b. Describe what the lines mean to you. Why?
  - Owusu-Bempah remembers fondly a university professor who had a big influence on his career choice and understanding that for most of human history drugs were not illegal, and that our first drug laws targeted Black Indigenous, Asian and Latino populations.
    - a. Who are some of the key influences in your life? Why? What did they teach you?
    - b. Who are some of the people you influence? How do you know?



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- What are some specific ways to support Owusu-Bempah's calls for action listed below?:
  - a. Erase criminal records of those convicted of crimes no longer illegal (not just pardons but expungement)
  - b. Ensure those targeted by the War on Drugs have the opportunity to benefit from fruits of legalization
  - c. Reinvest tax revenue from legal cannabis sales back into communities most affected by cannabis prohibition
- Owusu-Bempah says legalization offers an “opportunity for social change that comes with its own funding envelope.” In other words, the billions of dollars that went to police, courts, and correctional institutions should be used to repair communities by developing or expanding after-school programs, mentorship programs, and community health systems.
  - a. If you were in charge of community development, what would your plan for social change look like? How would you spend the money? Why?
  - b. How would you get others to believe and invest in your idea?