

# **D.A.R.E. Official Shares Personal Experience: Medical Cannabis Eases Cancer Pain**

## **Navigating Drug Education in a New Era**

The anti-drug group D.A.R.E.'s 2022 officer of the year asserts in a new online documentary that "alcohol is a gateway drug"—though he occasionally drinks it. But marijuana is another story and can't be safely enjoyed recreationally, he says, despite believing that cannabis has medical value after it helped treat his brother-in-law's cancer-related pain.

## **Reflecting on Past and Present Drug Policy**

D.A.R.E.'s president, meanwhile, acknowledges in the documentary that some of the criticism of the war on drugs might have something to do with earlier scandals within federal agencies, such as the CIA's implication in a cocaine-smuggling conspiracy that he described as an "unfortunate part of our history."

## **Reshaping D.A.R.E.'s Approach**

As the decades-old program works to reshape its image and move away from its scaremongering anti-drug roots under the Reagan administration, the leaders of the group convened for an international conference in Las Vegas last year where independent journalist Andrew Callaghan spoke to them about contemporary drug policy issues.

## **Conversations on Drug Use and Prevention**

One of the more notable conversations involved Alex Mendoza, the 2022 D.A.R.E. officer of the year, who has worked to redefine the program's approach to youth drug prevention.

## **Alcohol, Cannabis, and Perception**

"For me, it's really about educating the youth that are out there—to give them the tools necessary to navigate whatever pain that they're going through" that might lead to substance misuse, he said. "I think that if you don't have that self-love for yourself and that resiliency, then you're gonna go to that external source, whatever that might be."

## **Challenging Views on Gateway Drugs**

"Do you feel the same way about alcohol?" Callaghan asked.

"Absolutely. I mean, alcohol is a gateway drug," Mendoza said.

## **Personal Experience and Changing Perspectives**

However, the D.A.R.E. officer went on to say that he's aware there are "people out there that say that marijuana could be used to treat people that have some sort of illnesses to help them navigate and deal with that."

## **Acknowledging Historical Context**

Later in the documentary, Callaghan talks to D.A.R.E. President and CEO Francisco Pegueros, a retired Los Angeles Police Department officer who oversaw one of the department's more controversial divisions in the 1980s.

## **Facing Historical Realities**

"A lot of people were critical of the war on drugs overall," Callaghan acknowledged.

"Well, there was some evidence that certain governmental agencies were involved in a lot of activity that were kind of contrary to the whole concept of the war on drugs," Pegueros said.

## **Reflecting on Past Missteps**

"It's an unfortunate part of our history. But evidently, it's reality," Pegueros said.

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