

YOUTH & GUNS: MOTIVATIONS AND PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

AI County Report · Informal Brief for Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department
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ASU RESEARCH

An independent evaluation by **ASU's Youth Justice Lab** assessed the Gun Safety Program (GSP), a Maricopa County initiative delivered through Journey.do targeting youth impacted by firearms-related offenses. The study examined **post-program developmental outcomes** across firearm safety knowledge, legal awareness, and responsible decision-making, as well as **six-month recidivism outcomes** compared to a propensity-matched comparison group.

EARLY PROGRAM OUTCOMES — SHIFTS IN ATTITUDES & BELIEFS AFTER PARTICIPATION



Citation: Kim, J., Webb, M., & Fine, A.D. (2026). Gun Safety Education Program: Interim Evaluation Report (Data Through October 2025). Youth Justice Lab, School of Criminology & Criminal Justice, Arizona State University. January 8, 2026. Data collected via Journey.do. Findings are exploratory and descriptive — causal claims cannot be made at this stage.

Using Claude AI, we analyzed **1,500+ stories from 200+ justice-involved youth** to understand why youth carry guns — and what motivates them to stop. Peer influence, safety fears, and image drive carrying; future goals, trauma, and positive relationships drive change. These findings offer Maricopa County actionable insight for designing interventions that address root causes rather than behaviors alone.

WHY YOUTH CARRY GUNS

50.8% Peer Pressure & Friends

Over half cited friends as central to their decision — the single strongest driver. Reducing gun carrying requires reshaping group norms, not just individual choices.

26.0% Safety & Protection

A quarter viewed guns as a shield against danger — unsafe neighborhoods and personal fear drove many toward carrying.

19.7% Coolness & Image

Nearly 1 in 5 associated guns with respect. Cultural narratives must be countered with alternative sources of identity and pride.

3.5% Confidence & Power

A smaller group described carrying for control — reflecting deeper insecurities where personal power feels limited.

WHAT YOUTH LEARN THAT STOPS THEM

30.9% Future Goals & Aspirations

Nearly 1 in 3 connected leaving guns behind with their dreams. Seeing how carrying could cost them education and freedom is a powerful motivator.

24.8% Trauma & Witnessed Violence

Almost 1 in 4 were shaped by seeing friends or family hurt by guns — trauma that gave them new perspective on the cost of carrying.

20.4% Consequences & Regret

About 1 in 5 cited detention as the turning point. The experience of justice involvement was transformative when paired with reflection.

15.6% Better Choices & Positive Friends

Surrounding themselves with positive peers made a measurable difference — healthy relationships are a key protective factor.

235

Supported Youth

2,036

Accepted Stories

4,472

Completed Lessons

3 / 106

RE-ARREST OUTCOME —
FIRST 106 COMPLETERS

Only **3** of the first 106 program completers have been re-arrested — a **2.8% re-arrest rate**.