

Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department

PROJECT S.A.F.E. FIRST 120 DAYS

Transforming Youth Perspectives on Gun Use: A Path to Change





"This experience showed me that I can be better. I'm making choices that help me feel good about myself."

-Youth Participant

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Maricopa County Gun Safety program is designed to support youth who have been arrested, guiding them through a structured process that begins with a personal intake and continues as they submit stories of change through various modules, ending with a transition plan for future success. The program addresses themes such as using guns for social status, the impact of peer pressure, and struggles with emotional regulation.

Key Walkaways Thus Far:

- The challenges of self-defense, peer influence, and community violence weigh heavily on youth's mental health, contributing to anxiety, fear, and regret.
- Social pressure plays a significant role in youth's decisions to carry firearms, especially in communities where gun possession was seen as a status symbol or a way to gain respect.
- The motivation to achieve financial stability and a desire for personal growth offer paths toward mental well-being.
- Youth find strength through sharing their stories and relay how they are using them as stepping stones toward a better future.

supported

57 youth accepted 202 stories lessons

awarded 52 certificates

Key Story Themes

The Maricopa County Gun Safety Program addresses the misuse of firearms among youth by helping them understand the emotional, social, and mental health challenges associated with gun use. Based on real-life stories, the program highlights how carrying a gun can stem from deeper issues like peer pressure, low self-esteem, and the desire for social validation. These stories also reveal a strong motivation for change

Guns as a Status Symbol ("Flex")

Social pressure played a significant role in youth's decisions to carry firearms, especially in communities where gun possession was seen as a status symbol or a way to gain respect. This need to fit in often conflicted with personal values, leading to internal conflict, reduced self-esteem, and feelings of inauthenticity.

Around here, if you don't have a gun, you're seen as weak or scared. I didn't want to be either."



Self-Defense and Perceived Necessitv

Youth expressed feeling forced into carrying firearms due to safety concerns, which contributed to a state of hyper-vigilance and stress. The need to always be "prepared" for potential threats can lead to chronic anxiety and a sense of isolation, as individuals may feel they must rely solely on themselves for protection.

"With the constant threats around me, I couldn't see any other option to protect myself."

Impact of Community Violence

The influence of violence in their communities shaped their perceptions and actions toward gun ownership. Exposure to constant danger created a culture of fear and desensitization to violence. For some, this led to hopelessness and emotional numbness, as they saw no other options but to adapt to their environment for survival.

"Living in a place where violence is so routine, having a gun becomes part of survival."



Youth expressed a wish for safer, more supportive environments where they wouldn't feel compelled to carry firearms. Despite the hardships, several youth found that reflecting on their choices motivated them toward self-improvement and a renewed focus on mental health.

"This experience showed me that I can be better. I'm making choices that help me feel good about myself."

Financial Stability as a Goal

For some youth, the desire for financial security and independence acted as a positive force, motivating them to make decisions that aligned with their longterm well-being. This focus on financial goals provided a constructive outlet, giving them purpose and helping them envision a future beyond the challenges of their current environment.

"I'm working towards being financially stable so I can leave this place and live a life that's safe and free of fear."

Regret and Consequences of Gun Possession

Many youth expressed regret and remorse over the consequences of their choices to carry firearms, particularly when these decisions led to legal issues or damaged relationships. This regret often manifested as guilt and a sense of lost opportunities, with youth feeling trapped by their past mistakes.

"If I knew what would happen, I would have never made that choice. It's hard to look back."

Story Highlights



My Journey to Making Better Choices

It all started when I began hanging out with the wrong people. I was just trying to fit in, and they seemed cool. They had money, respect, and nobody messed with them. I felt like I needed to prove myself and carrying a gun seemed like the way to do that. It made me feel invincible and safe but now I see that it just put me in a bad situation.

What do you think led to your decision to possess a gun?

The reason I think I wanted to feel safe and be respected. I thought if I had a gun, people would take me seriously and I'd be ready if someone tried to mess with me. Also there was pressure from the people around me they made it seem like having a gun was normal like it was just part of the life. But also was feeling paranoid , and having a gun felt like a way to protect myself, even though it only caused more problems.

How have these experiences and your arrest shaped your outlook on your future?

Getting arrested was a big wake up call. It made me realize that the choices I was making weren't just bad but they were leading me down a bad path in life . I don't want to keep ending up in trouble so my arrest showed me that if I keep going like this I could lose everything.It's made me think a lot about what I really want for my future and how I don't want to waste my life.

What can you do now to improve your outlook for your own future?

I need to focus on making better choices and being around people who want to see me do well. I'm trying to listen more to the people who care about me like my family and probation officer and think more before I act. I know I need to stay away from the people I was with and find new ways to deal with stuff that don't involve violence or carrying a gun. Setting some goals and sticking to them will help me too, like finishing school and doing good at my business.

What do you hope to learn from this?

I hope to learn how to make better choices and how to deal with my feelings without getting into trouble. I want to learn how to stand up for myself in a positive way and how to build a future where I don't have to worry all the time.



test

What lead me to these choices was probably because of the people i hanged out with the type of friends i picked and i started making the same choices they were making. How these choices have changed my outlook in the future is that i know to make these mistakes again and just focus on school and a career you wanna do in the future. How we can all improve in this is buy picking the right friends to be around with and that you know wont make you don't things you don't want to or will get you in trouble. What i hope to learn from this is to make the right choices from here on and not make those mistakes again in the future. What i would say lead me to get a gun was probably because of the threats i was getting. The choice that lead me to this journey was because i wanna change and these are the first steps i gotta take to change.



Cane Eggers

#1090071

Saquan Bonets #1084491

8/22/2024 3:00 PM

Thanks for sharing! It takes a lot of growth to recognize how the choices you made and influences from your past have impacted your life journey. You are taking a crucial step toward positive changes by starting to understand that the company you keep can significantly affect your decisions. It's insightful that you recognize how the choices and influences from your past have impacted your path. Your objective should be to focus on making better choices and surround yourself with supportive, positive people. This is an important part of your journey. The easiest way to stay on track is to learn from your past mistakes and use them to guide your future decisions. It's clear you're committed to focusing on your education and career, and that's a strong foundation for moving forward. Keep setting goals for yourself, and continue building a support system that encourages your growth.

8/13/2024 2:39 PM

Hey Isaiah. Thank you so much for sharing your story. The reflection you've done on what led to your choices, the impacts of them, and the changes you want to make is powerful and inspiring. I really appreciate your openness and honesty here. It takes so much strength to reflect like this, and you should be so proud of that! Focusing on surrounding yourself with people who care about you and setting goals to keep moving forward are amazing steps to take toward the future you want. That will absolutely help you finish school, grow your business, and accomplish anything else you want! As you continue on this journey, remember that reflecting on your emotions and the specific moments that led to your growth can help you stay connected to your goals and remind you why you're making these changes. Keep believing in your ability to grow and make positive choices, and know that you're on the right path! Great work.

Story Highlights



11/5/2024 6:10 PM

Hey Dylan. Thank you for sharing your story. You did a great job sharing a real-life example of gun safety! Your story shows how important it is to know about gun safety. even if you don't own a gun yourself. You made a smart choice by leaving when you felt unsafe. That was brave and responsible, and you should be really proud. It takes maturity and courage to make a choice like that! Keep making decisions that protect you and the amazing future you're building. Your strength to speak up and leave when things aren't right is powerful, so keep using it to keep yourself and others safe. Awesome job!

lead don't follow

A couple of weeks ago I went too a friends house and noticed he had a gun on his cabinet shelf loaded and out in the open. I told him it was unsafe too have it an the open and he just ignored me. I ended up leaving because I felt unsafe about the gun being loaded and out in the open never knowing who was going too grab it or if it would accidently go off or anything like that because I was unfamiliar with gun safety as well as I am now. In my opinion I think if you're in that situation its in your best benefit too just leave and befriend that person if they are not going too listen your your advice





11/5/2024 2:19 PM

Hi Michael thanks for sharing your story! You've done a great job sharing your dreams for the future! It's awesome that you have such clear goals and understand the steps to reach them. Your plan to work hard, learn from your dad, and surround yourself with positive people is really smart. As you mentioned, staying away from firearms is important for you and your future, as you don't want anything stopping you from achieving your dreams. By recognizing that having a firearm only puts that future at risk, you are further motivated to protect it. Nice job sharing your story and growing your future! You're making great progress!! :)



Left a Reaction

Future

The dreams I have in the future are for me to retire my dad, a big house with my wife, own a lot of cars, and run my own truck for the pool company. I plan on continuing to work really hard every day and taking only the right steps to get there, like paying attention to what my dad does at work and investing in stuff that could make me more money in the future. Another thing I will do is only have positive people around me that also wanna work really hard that want to have a bright future too. Staying away from guns is a big part of my plan because I don't want to be in trouble for nonsense that is going to stop my future in anyway. I just want to accomplish my dreams and have a bright future and having guns is not going to be a thing to help me in anyway their just going to get you into trouble.

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Using Guns as a Social "Flex"

"All I really cared about was carrying a gun around, thinking it was cool. But now I'm learning it was a mistake. Guns are not made to look cool; they're for proper protection. What I hope to learn is to stop carrying guns and getting into trouble because it leads nowhere but to being arrested."

Many youth viewed guns as a status symbol, carrying a gun as a way to appear "cool" or gain respect but later recognized the negative consequences of this mindset. Impacts on Mental Health:

- Low Self-Esteem: The need to "flex" guns for social status often stems from underlying insecurities and low self-esteem, which negatively impacts mental health.
- Increased Anxiety: The pressure to maintain an image of toughness or control through gun ownership can lead to heightened anxiety and stress.
- Emotional Compensation: Using guns as a symbol of power can be an emotional compensation for unresolved trauma or feelings of inadequacy.
- Risk of Emotional Numbness: Some individuals may become emotionally numb, as they rely on external validation from dangerous behaviors, suppressing their true feelings.

In these stories, guns are used as a social tool to mask deeper emotional struggles, where the need for validation contributes to deteriorating mental health.

1 Carrying a gun to feel "cool"

"One day I chose to take my parents' gun while they were at work so I could feel cool walking to the store. Since that day, I've experienced that holding a gun can get you in trouble. I now understand that holding a gun underage is not the right thing to do."

2

Reflecting on the image of "being cool"

"Since the day I got arrested, I've been working on bettering myself, always asking if it was worth 'being cool' by owning a gun. It is not—it just led me down a bad path. But I've learned a lot and made goals to get stronger and have a better future."

3 Impact of thinking a gun makes you powerful

"It's crazy to think how one decision we make can change our life forever. I chose to be around someone with an illegal firearm. I never thought about the consequences, but now I've realized so much. I'm learning to make smarter decisions and focus on what's important: God, family, and school."

When will it happen?

"I was trying to fit in. They had money, respect, and nobody messed with them. Carrying a gun made me feel invincible and safe, but now I see it just put me in a bad situation. It was more about feeling respected and powerful, but it caused more problems than it solved." **Desire for Change and Personal Growth**

"Since the day I got arrested, I've been working on bettering myself, always asking myself if it was worth 'being cool' by owning a gun. It is not—it all led me down a bad path. But I've learned a lot and made goals. It made me want to get stronger and have a better future."

Despite the challenges, a strong desire for change and personal growth was evident in many stories. Youth expressed motivation to make better choices and improve their circumstances, often setting goals for a more positive future.

- Increased Hope and Optimism: Individuals who express a desire for change often exhibit a sense of hope and optimism, which contributes to improved mental health.
- Motivation from Past Struggles: Personal growth is often driven by the recognition of past emotional challenges, motivating individuals to make positive changes.
- Emotional Resilience: The process of working toward change can build emotional resilience, helping individuals cope with stress and setbacks more effectively.
- Challenges with Mental Exhaustion: Despite the desire for change, the journey can be mentally exhausting as individuals confront difficult emotional truths and strive for improvement.

These stories demonstrate how the pursuit of personal growth can have both positive and taxing effects on mental health, often acting as a turning point for recovery.

1 Learning from mistakes

"What led me here was hanging with the wrong group of people and making decisions I shouldn't have made. While in my cell, I was thinking about stuff I can do better with my life, like sticking to work and hanging around the right people to go down the right path. I've learned a lot from this because now I know the rights and wrongs."

2 Becoming more responsible

"Through my experience of being arrested and in possession of a firearm, I've learned a lot about the consequences of my actions and knowledge about gun safety. This will help me in the future to be a more responsible person and make better decisions."

3 The need for self-improvement

"My journey in this program so far is showing me how to be safe with guns and stop using them. It's an eyeopener for me. What would help me in the future is probably getting better friends, doing my own hobbies, and keeping my mind busy. I hope to stop carrying guns and getting into trouble."

Reflecting for change

"One day I chose to take my parents' gun to feel cool walking to the store. Since that day, I've learned that holding a gun can get you in trouble. I can complete this class to learn from the mistake and make better decisions in the future."

Peer Pressure and Negative Influence

"What led me to these choices was probably the people I hung out with—the type of friends I picked—and I started making the same choices they were making. How we can improve is by picking the right friends to be around, ones that won't make you do things you don't want to or get you in trouble."

These stories highlight negative peer influence as a contributing factor to the individual's challenges. The pressure to conform to harmful behaviors and lack of positive role models were recurring concerns:

- Increased Anxiety and Stress: Peer pressure or the need to fit in can lead to poor decision-making, which often results in feelings of regret, anxiety, and stress.
- Emotional Isolation: Trying to conform to peer expectations may cause feelings of isolation when the individual realizes they are not aligned with the group.
- Anger and Aggression: Peers can contribute to emotional instability, triggering anger or aggression, especially when individuals feel belittled or pressured.
- Struggles with Emotional Regulation: Peer influence can make it harder to control emotions, leading to impulsive reactions that further damage relationships and well-being.

In these stories, peers play a crucial role in either exacerbating or alleviating mental health struggles, depending on the supportiveness or negativity of the relationships.

1 Peer pressure and bad Influences

"What led me here was just me hanging with the wrong group of people and making decisions I shouldn't have made. I thought having a firearm would make me feel safer and look cool, but I realized it wasn't a great idea when I ended up getting caught and doing time."

2 Peer pressure and proving oneself

"I was just trying to fit in, and they seemed cool. They had money, respect, and nobody messed with them. I felt like I needed to prove myself, and carrying a gun seemed like the way to do that. It made me feel invincible and safe, but now I see it just put me in a bad situation."

3 More on negative impacts

There was pressure from the people around me—they made it seem like having a gun was normal, like it was just part of life. But getting arrested was a big wake-up call. It made me realize the choices I was making weren't just bad but were leading me down a bad path."

4 Mental health and bullying

"When I first moved to the U.S., I didn't understand English well, and people kept making fun of me. The only solution I thought of was fighting back, but I acted out of anger and got myself in trouble."

An important evidence-based practice leverage in the platform is related to positive peer influence. Youth start each Module by connecting with peer stories, using emojis to support and celebrate each other's positive stories in a safe and encouraging way. By seeing real examples of change, they're inspired to make better choices, leveraging the power of peers to drive their own growth.

EXAMPLE PLANS

Growth plans are created at intake through a 30-45 minute meeting where motivational interviews are conducted to build a coaching connection, established aligned motive, and onboard the youth to the platform. At outtake, another meeting occurs to review the youth's progress and reinforce change as well as set them up for ongoing success.



· You have big dreams and goals for your future, including finishing school, getting a good job, and taking care of your family. The "Protecting Futures" journey will show you how staying away from guns opens doors to achieving your aspirations and making a positive impact.

By completing these journeys, you'll gain crucial knowledge and skills to keep yourself and others safe make smart choices, and build the successful future you envision. I'm confident they will empower you on your path forward.

STRENGTHS TO SUCCEED

- Isaiah, you have a lot of great strengths that will help you get the most out of these journeys
- Motivation to better vourself: Despite challenges, you are driven to improve your life and achieve your goals. This inner motivation will fuel your progress.
- · Maturity and perspective: You understand the importance of avoiding negative influences, like petty arguments on social media. Your levelheaded perspective will serve you well.
- · Work ethic: Your commitment to finding a job and working hard to support your family shows your strong work ethic. Applying this diligence to the journeys will ensure you gain the full henefits
- · Supportive family and friends: Although your relationship with your nana can be complicated, it's clear you care deeply for your family. You also have positive, ambitious friends who want to see you succeed. Lean on their support and make them proud.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Isaiah, as you complete the Journeys and build your strengths, there are a few potential challenges that would be helpful to keep in mind:

- · Overcoming an "old-fashioned" mindset: You mentioned your nana and others sometimes have an "old-fashioned" outlook and may not fully understand or encourage your goals. Remember, you're in charge of your future. Stay true to your aspirations even if others don't "get it" right away.
- · Lingering influence of past choices: Your past experiences with guns and getting shot may make certain parts of the content uncomfortable or emotional. If you find yourself struggling, don't hesitate to reach out for support. Your coach is always here for you.
- · Frustration with job search: Not hearing back immediately from jobs you've applied for can be discouraging. But don't let that derail your progress in the journeys. Your persistence and positivity will pay off in landing a great job, and the skills you gain from the journeys will serve you well in your career too.

Ultimately, your strengths far outweigh any challenges. Stay focused on your goals, take it one day at a time, and know that you have what it takes to thrive. I believe in you!

Assigned Certificates	Due Date	Date Completed	
1. Complete Gun Safety: Why it Matters Certificate	8/5/2024		
2. Complete Gun Safety: Making Good Choices Certificate	8/23/2024	8/22/2024	
3. Complete Gun Safety: Protecting Futures Certificate	9/13/2024		

Transition Plan on Outtake

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		22 Connects	19 Grows	3 Modules	1 Certs
Darren N Darren Nielson CERTIFICATES These are the key growth areas to be engaged as part of the growth plan.		3 Stori		10 modales	
			3 Highlighte	d Stories	
	🛱 "Gun Safe	ty: Protecting Futur	н		
					*Required

I also see growth in your ability to make positive decisions now, like consciously choosing friends who are a good influence and bring out the best in you. You understand how easily good choices can negatively impact pour life, and your taking control by surrounding yourself with people and activities that insigns you. That kind of thoughtful decision-making and commitment to your personal growth is so impressive. Keep narturing those healthy relationships, interests, and inner voice that guides you towards your best self.

MOVING FORWARD

There you're made excellent progress in recognizing the consequences of poor choices and risky situations. Moving forward, keep trusting that inner wice and surrounding yourself with positive infit Meen you for dyourcell in an environment that makes you unconfertable or confidence or cold add to harmful do don't heshate to remove yourself from that situation. You've shown you can make those tough calls.

It's also crucial to stay committed to priorities and interests that keep you grounded, like sports, art, or ding quality time with family who supports you. Having an outer for your energy and possion is a vrant. When you feel conflicted emotions or life gets stressful, lean into those healthy habits. He ortant. When you feel conflicted emotions on suggestions for continuing your growth:

- Keep practicing calming techniques like deep breathing when you feel anger, anxiety, or stress rising
- Verify practicing carring incriminates are deep oreazing writer you rever angle, anterity or saves range
 Write down your goals and look back frequently, celebrating small wins along the way
 Identify positive mentors you admine and let their example motivate you
 Dorth be afraid to aak for help from counselors, teachers, coaches having a strong support system is

You've gained remarkable self-awareness already. Stay focused on making empowered choices that align with your values and vision for the future. I'm confident you'll continue progressing and maturing into the son you want to become

Assigned Certificates	Due Date	Date Complete	ed
1. Complete Gun Safety: Why it Matters Certificate	8/26/2024	8/20/2024	
2. Complete Gun Safety: Making Good Choices Certificate	9/15/2024		
3. Complete Gun Safety: Protecting Futures Certificate	10/5/2024		
tole	Signature	Initials	Date
JPO			
JPO Supervisor			
Guardian			

HIGHLIGHTED STORIES



Gun Safety Gun safety is defanity a skill and thing everyone should know a lot about and learn. There can be many bud things that happen if you don't know gun safety. Im goons at ley as a troy about when I was a kid and accidentally misfind a sub or the safety of an elected state of the safety of the safet

peter gun, i am super thankful it was a peter gun and not real gun. Hird. There was a peter gun with the safety of in the comment or to the back door. Lastly i was just a kid so you can guess what happened i accidentally presed a pulde the trigger. The gun went off and left a whole in the root. I learned if the gun was in a better spot or not in sight at all that wouldn't of happened. I also learned to stay away from pulling the trigger on a gun i don't know if it loaded or not. That should be an example of why you should know gun safety.

Impact Of Choices

The impact of your choices can range and very many different things, for

decision and in many many area in a market of the second s

Why Gun Safety



Our Approach

We provide an anytime, anywhere growth platform, supported by growth specialists committed to youth success, supported by AI to ensure personalized case management from intake to outtake.



01 INTAKE MEETING

1:1 Meeting to build rapport, identify needs, set goals, align motive, and onboard user.



First major achievement when individual completes desired number of Modules in an area.

05 TRANSITION PLAN

Final summary of achievements, challenges, and next-steps as a forward looking action plan.



Personalized roadmap with plan, and justification of why it will lead to meaningful growth.



If multiple certs expected, second significant milestone achieved based on completed Modules.

06 OUTTAKE MEETING

Conclusive session to affirm success, discuss challenges, and ensure future success.

1. CURATING ALIGNED MOTIVE

- Build a Coaching Connection (Grant, 2003)
- Assess Current Potential (Moen & Federici, 2012)
- Create a Plan for Success (Locke & Latham, 2002)
- Establish Authentic Motive (Deci & Ryan, 2008)

2. POWERING CONNECTED GROWTH

- Provide Meaningful Goals (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999)
- Curate Peer Inspiration (Miller & Rollnick, 2012)
- Use Quality Content (Ward, 2009)
- Encourage Life Integration (McAdams, 2001)
- Provide Strength-Based Feedback (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012)
- Reinforce Social Reputation (Christakis & Fowler, 2013)
- Leverage AI Insights (Gilkson & Woolley, 2020; Dede, 2021)

3. REINFORCING LIFE CHANGE

- Validate Growth Milestones (Locke & Latham, 2002)
- Review Struggles (Prochaska, DiClemente et al. 1992)
- Plan for Life Success (Schwartz et al., 2002)

Evidence-Based Practices



ABOUT US

Lifelab Studios is a spin-out of Arizona State University and is led by a team of learning scientists, platform engineers, growth specialists, and successful entrepreneurs.

Our program solutions bring together what we know about human learning, relationships, and innovation.

We Believe that

Personal growth is critical for life success and fulfillment, and that everyone has the potential to do amazing things.

We are committed to

Providing organizations and youth with the best social growth platform in the world, supported in a manner to ensure personal growth.

We are deeply passionate

About powering personal growth through small group journeys where members are seen, valued, and validated for what they are able to achieve.

Schedule a Demo Contact: <u>matthew@lifelabstudios.org</u>







A personal growth and wellness company.

Makers of



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Judges Assigning Project SAFE