

A SHOPLIFTING ALTERNATIVE
FOR JUVENILES

April 13, 2004

by

Trishell Marshall and Tammy Johnston

A SHOPLIFTING ALTERNATIVE FOR JUVENILES

There are approximately 23 million shoplifters in our nation today, and retailers lose \$10 billion in merchandise each year because of shoplifting. In Kosciusko County, in 2003 alone, there were 122 theft related juvenile arrests. The juveniles ranged in age from 10-17. Because of this, we researched a program that would educate juvenile shoplifters in order to prevent any further penetration in the criminal justice system. We did this in hopes that the juvenile, merchants, and in turn, the general public, will benefit.

Fifty-five percent of adult shoplifters said they started stealing in their teenage years. Juvenile shoplifting should be taken seriously because it can become a long term habit. 35% of first time offenders are at high risk of repeating the offense. Currently, there is no program in Kosciusko County to educate juveniles on the effects of shoplifting. Therefore, we researched a program that could be implemented by an agency for Kosciusko Juvenile Shoplifters.

A juvenile would be referred to the program after an arrest for shoplifting. The Probation Department would then bring the juvenile and their parents in for an intake interview. At that point, the juvenile would be given the information about the program. As a term of their probation, they would go through the program.

The program is called Youth Educational Shoplifting, or Y.E.S. Their mission is to help juveniles stop shoplifting by providing effective programs and ongoing support services in a confidential setting. Educating both adult and juvenile shoplifters about the problems and about themselves has proven to be one of the most effective means of encouraging offenders to stop shoplifting. The effectiveness of offense specific educational programs for shoplifters has been documented in recidivism studies conducted within local courts and law enforcement agencies. The recidivism rate commonly ranges between 1.5% and 3 % for educational programs, compared to up to 25% in communities without programs. It consists of two study methods, the Home Study and Class/Workshop Program. It can be offered as either the Home Study alone, or a combination of the two.

The Home Study is 5-6 hours of offense specific education using compact discs and a workbook. The topics for this portion include the reason people shoplift, how it effects the lives of people, the law and consequences, how shoplifting can become a habit or an addiction, security technology used in stores, how much risk is taken for such a small reward, how personal and social pressures trigger a shoplifting incident, the rush or high that people experience with getting away with it, and how to stop. They answer questions in a workbook along with completing the psychological profile analysis and risk assessment. That is turned into the agency to be graded and evaluated. The agency then decides if the at risk offenders need to attend the full day workshop.

The Class Workshop is a full day interactive workshop with 10-12 juveniles talking about their shoplifting experience, feelings when caught, consequences when caught, motivation for stealing, stresses and problems, risks and rewards, critical danger signals, and a plan to stop shoplifting. At the end of the workshop, each youth meets privately with an instructor to review personal

issues and identify the possible need for additional support services.

Shoplifters Alternative would provide local staff training at no charge. The cost for the materials is \$39 per offender for the Home Study Only, and \$45 per offender for the combination of the two. The facilitating agency would then decide how much to charge each individual. Most of the time, this is done on a sliding scale.

In order to start the program, we need an agency to facilitate it. The agency will need to pre-purchase the first box of home study kits to get started. This would be at a cost of \$975 to \$1125, depending on how many people start.

Shoplifters alternative is currently being used by approximately 500 courts in 45 states. They have found that 96% of juveniles successfully complete the program. Because of this, we believe that the juvenile, merchants, and general public would benefit greatly from this program.

For more information about the program, you may contact:

Trishell Marshall at 574-269-9600, ext. 258 or TrishellM@yahoo.com or Tammy Johnston at 574-772-2412 or tjohnston@insightbb.com.