Teenage Vandal Gets Caught
But Instead of Going to Prison, He “Rights the Wrong”

Cynthia Peters

When a teenager in Louisville, Kentucky, was caught and convicted of vandalizing a car wash, the judge did not sentence him. Instead, the owner of the car wash Keith Bush sat down with the teenager, and together they decided how the victim of the crime could be “restored.”

In this model of restorative justice, the victim and the offender play a role in deciding what to do after a crime is committed. “The perpetrator can sit across from the victim, own up, say they are sorry,” said Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. Fisher believes that this approach is better than putting someone behind bars, which might lead them to more criminal activity.

Jefferson Circuit Court Judge Angela McCormick Bisig said that this new approach will cost less and will help reduce the number of people in prison or in juvenile detention. “It costs $20,000 to lock somebody up for a year. You know that we don’t even have enough places to lock people up anymore, and that’s more than it costs to send a kid to college a year.”

Keith Bush, the owner of the car wash, said that the youth did about $1,800 worth of damage to his business. They agreed that the youth would come and do $1,800 worth of work to make up the damage. Bush would put the money in a special account, and the young person could use the money for college. If he decides not to use it for college, Bush would simply keep the money.

Bush felt that by supporting the teen to go to college, he was “reinvesting in him, giving him an opportunity to move on from something he did as a juvenile.” Bush believes that restorative justice empowers the offender to “right a wrong.” He hopes that this young person will go on to show someone else grace rather than be imprisoned and “bottled up in a cell,” where he might just feel more and more angry.

Cynthia Peters is the editor of The Change Agent. Background on this article comes from: <www.wlky.com>.

“I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends.”

– Nelson Mandela

Describe a time you turned an enemy into a friend.

Read the article on the next page.

How is Keith Bush’s story an example of restorative justice?