

*Lorraine Swanson is founder and editor of the on-line news journal LakeEffectNews.com. In 1994 Lorraine founded the High School Study Group, a section of the Epworth Tutoring Program, predecessor organization to the Inspired Youth Tutoring Program. She wrote this email letter when a student of Inspired Youth was stopped by the police.*

Several months ago Beth Palmer forwarded me an e-mail from the mother of a student in the Inspired Youth tutoring program. We'll call this young man "John." Beth described John as a decent kid who goes to church several times a week and attends Truman College. John has some learning disabilities and sometimes has difficulty expressing himself. He is also African-American.

According to John's mother, "Mrs. Jones," John was stopped in the evening on his way home from classes at Truman. The police asked John if he was "carrying any weed." There may have been a reasonable explanation of why the police stopped Andrew. Police may have received a call or multiple calls from neighbors reporting a male black in his late teens who was seen selling weed on a street corner, approaching a car, or doing a hand-to-hand drug transaction. A street robbery may have just taken place, and police were acting on numerous radio calls from the 911 Center or Office of Emergency Communications. The police may have been too busy sorting out radio calls trying to get a handle on the situation to apologize or explain the reason why certain kids were being stopped.

At the time I received Beth's e-mail, there had been a rise in car break-ins in Edgewater where John lives and we were running a mission trying to catch the thieves. Eventually, John was released by police.

As a journalist who has worked exclusively on Chicago's Far North Side covering the neighborhoods of Rogers Park, West Ridge, Edgewater and Uptown, I frequently hear from readers wanting to report incidents of police racial profiling.

Not knowing the entire story of the person who got stopped and questioned by police, these are always very tough calls to make. If the reader cannot provide the name of the officer and his/her badge number, I have no way of checking out that person's story with the local police commander or determining if there is a pattern of abuse by one particular cop or cops.

I agree that racial profiling is alive and well in Chicago, as it is elsewhere throughout the world, whether an individual is "driving while black" or is pulled aside because of his or her Middle Eastern heritage when trying to board an airplane.

The issue of racial profiling in our neighborhoods seems to most frequently target youth. I've listened to a lot of young people who are exemplary students and good kids complain of being stopped by police in our neighborhoods and having contact cards filled out on them. Some of these young people are dressing in a certain way. Their

pants drop below the butt, or they are wearing a certain color jacket or hoody with a brand or sports logo that may be associated with a local gang.

Kids have often told me “it’s the fashion,” but most police in our neighborhoods can’t tell the innocent youth who are making a fashion statement from the gangbangers, so they stop everybody.

If you feel that you are being unfairly targeted, or are a parent of a child who tells you that he/she is being “harassed” by police, here are a few tips from someone who has attended hundreds of CAPS and community meetings in our neighborhoods.

1. Are you dressing like a gang member? As President Obama said, “pull up your pants.” What kind of jacket or sweatshirt are you wearing? Are you wearing clothing that it makes it difficult for police to tell if you might be engaged in gang activity, such as a white T-shirt, or a certain brand or sports emblem associated with one of the neighborhood gangs? You and/or your parents might want to sit down and assess your attire or any other behavior, such as being out after curfew, that might be calling the cops’ attention.
2. If you are being treated rudely by police, then I suggest you have your parent or guardian call the district commander. If you live in the 24<sup>th</sup> Police District (north of Thorndale in Rogers Park) contact Commander Michael Wick; between Thorndale and Lawrence in Edgewater, contact Commander Lucy Moy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Police District; south of Lawrence (Uptown), contact Commander Kathleen Boehmer in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Police District.

Your local police commander wants to hear from citizens if their officers have behaved rudely or unprofessionally in the field. Young people might be too intimidated to ask for the officer’s badge number. Look at the numbers on the side or on the back of the squad car and note the time of day and date, so that the commander can backtrack and see who was on duty. For unmarked cars, note the license plate. (All unmarked police cars’ plate numbers begin with the letter “M.”) Parents should explain the situation to the local commander calmly and clearly.

3. If you’re in high school or college, you and/or your family members should attend your local CAPS meetings. It’s a good idea to attend your local CAPS meeting anyway to hear about neighborhood crime, especially after an incident has occurred in your neighborhood, such as a shooting, gang fight or other unusual act that is out of the norm. Going to CAPS meetings also allows you to develop relationships with local police and your CAPS beat facilitator, typically a local resident or business owner. You and/or your parents can address any concerns with local police about racial profiling or other forms of harassment. By showing an interest in your community, cops get to know you and your family as residents who are concerned about crime and safety in your neighborhood. As a journalist,

I see African-Americans, Latinos and other people of color woefully under represented at community and CAPS meetings, and other neighborhood events. For neighborhoods that are among the most ethnically diverse in the United States, white people remain the majority in most of the meetings that I cover.

4. If you don't know your police beat, call your local police district's CAPS office or go to [www.cityofchicago.org/police](http://www.cityofchicago.org/police) to find out which beat you live in.
5. Many of our neighborhoods are planning "positive loitering" events this summer where residents hang out in parks and other trouble spots to deter crime and gang activity. It's a great opportunity to get to know your neighbors. Starting at 6 p.m. on Monday nights through the end August, The Neighborhood First organization is hosting "Edgewater Neighborhood Nights" at Broadway and Thorndale, featuring board games, cards, entertainment and refreshments. Similarly, The Neighborhood First is also hosting "Uptown Neighborhood Nights" at Winthrop and Winona near Goudy School starting at 6 p.m. Wednesday through the end of August.

In Rogers Park at Willye B. White Park, the neighborhood CAPS group is hosting a games night and community safety walk through the North of Howard neighborhood starting at 7 p.m. every Friday through the end of August, as well as other fun events, like "Dancing in the Park." All of these events are free and families are especially welcome.

In Uptown at the corner of Leland and Sheridan, positive loiterers are gathering every Friday starting at 7 p.m. through the late fall.

You can also check out Rep. Harry Osterman's free "Furry Friends Summerfest" outdoor pet market, which takes place near the Broadway Armory at Thorndale and Broadway, starting at 7 p.m. every Wednesday through the end of August. If you like dogs, this is the place to be.

6. The benefit of going to CAPS meetings and positive loitering events is that it allows police to get to know you and your family. Police know you as parents who care about your children's activity and behavior or as a young person that aspires to be productive members of your community. You should also not be afraid to make a stand against the criminal elements in your neighborhood, nor should you withhold information about a crime committed in your community. You will be helping your younger brothers and sisters, as well as other families in your neighborhood that may be or at risk of becoming crime victims. It's time to break the cycle of silence. I have received many tragic e-mails and phone calls from family members whose loved ones were murdered by gang members, desperate for information about who killed their sons, daughters, or siblings.

Unfortunately, what prevents many people from going to police with information about crimes or reporting crimes in which they are victims, is that many citizens

feel that police leave them unprotected after they become witnesses in a criminal trial. All of our police districts provide volunteer court advocates, usually your neighbors, who support and stand with prosecution witnesses and crime victims during criminal court trials. It's hard for the bad guys to pick out who is testifying against them when you are surrounded by two, three, four or five other people in court.

7. You can also report crimes anonymously to Crime Stoppers and to your local police area office. (Area 3 at Belmont and Western, for the Far North Side.) In many instances, Crime Stoppers and the local Area detective divisions will assign callers "personal identification numbers" or "PINS," much like the code you use to access an ATM machine, that allows you to anonymously collect on monetary rewards if they are being offered.

The phone numbers to report crimes on the Far North Side are:

- Area 3 (Rogers Park, West Ridge, Edgewater, Uptown, Ravenswood, Lincoln Square, North Center, Lakeview, Lincoln Park) 312-747-8261
- Narcotic/Gun Tip Toll Free Hotline 1-877-CPD-GUNS (1-877-273-4867)
- Crack 44 Toll Free Hotline 1-800-CRACK-44 (1-800-272-2544)
- Gang Hotline 773-533- GANG (773-533-4264)
- Cook County Crimestoppers (24/7, toll free) 1-800-535-STOP (7867). *(Callers never have to give their names and are eligible for cash awards starting at \$1,000. For more information visit [Cook County Crimestoppers](#).)*