

# Chicago youth organization struggling to stay afloat

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Little did Diane Latiker, a 54 year-old, community activist in Chicago, know that when Steve Kaplan volunteered to work at her [youth](http://www.examiner.com/topic/youth) [organization](http://www.examiner.com/topic/organization) in September that he also had a hidden agenda.

Kaplan, a [millionaire](http://www.examiner.com/topic/millionaire/articles) and best selling author, not only volunteered at Latiker's "Kids Off the Black Inc." organization for a week, but also stayed in a one-bedroom apartment around the

corner from the organization at 11627 S. Michigan Ave. He also lived off a \$50 week allowance.

“I had no idea who this guy was at all. I was shocked when I learned the truth about him,” Latiker told *Examiner.com*. “I was completely caught off guard by Mr. Kaplan who is truly an angle in disguise.”

Now the whole world can see just how Kaplan fooled Latiker and the hundreds of Black youth her non-profit organization serves on the latest episode of “Secret Millionaire” when it airs at 7 p.m. Sunday, July 1 on the ABC network.

And Latiker is inviting everyone to come watch the show with her and her “kids” at a viewing party held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on July 1 at Moe’s Catina, 155 W. Kinzie St. in Chicago.

The viewing party is also a fundraiser for the organization, which currently is not receiving any funding and operates solely “on a prayer,” confesses Latiker. Tickets to attend the viewing party are \$100 in advance and \$125 at the door. Dinner and drinks are included. Kaplan arranged the viewing party and will be in attendance. To purchase tickets in advance or to make a donation, call the organization at 773-981-4077 or go to their website at [www.kobchicago.org](http://www.kobchicago.org) (<http://www.kobchicago.org>).

At first, Latiker said she thought Kaplan was a regular volunteer.

“ABC came to me and said they had heard great things about my organization and wanted to do a feature story on us. They also said they had a volunteer they wanted to be a part of the filming and I said sure,” recalled Latiker.

But after a few days Latiker said she started noticing that the film crew was focusing too much on Kaplan and not on the kids and that pissed her off.

“I kept saying this is about the kids and not him. A week later when Steve was getting ready to leave he asked me if I would gather all the kids up so he could say good-bye. That’s when he surprised us with a \$100,000 donation,” she added. “He also built an outdoor basketball court, purchased three, new computers and he bought us cleaning equipment like brooms and mops since we often clean up on the block.”

Kids Off the Black sponsored a June 22 youth rally outside its headquarters in the Roseland community on Chicago’s South Side where 100 youth showed up.

“We need jobs. An idle mind does no good,” said John Harris, 21, who attended the rally. “All young people are not in gangs or use drugs. Some of us really do want to work and be self sufficient.”

A resident of the Roseland community herself for the past 25 years, Latiker has seen the street trappings that often push so many young people especially Black [males](http://www.examiner.com/topic/males/articles) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/males/articles>) down the wrong path.

“I lost four kids to violence since opening Kids Off the Block (in 2007). The last one was killed Oct. 30, 2009. He was just 19-years-old but a good kid,” recalled Latiker. “I knew he was going places and headed somewhere great. I just didn’t know it was Heaven.”

Her organization serves youth age 12 to 24 years old and 80 percent of the participants are black males,

she said.

“Black males are quickly becoming extinct in the world and we have to save them. I have had boys in here from different gangs but that has never been a problem because everyone respects me, what I am trying to do and the confines of these walls,” explained Latiker. “Everyone knows once inside the center it is a safe haven from danger and no one crosses that line.”

In 2010, thanks to some generous donors Latiker was able to move the organization out of her home and next-door into a commercial building. She confessed to making many sacrifices to keep the organization going prior to receiving the hefty donation.

“I sold the family TV for \$600 so I could buy some used computers for the kids. My husband, who is disabled and works full-time with the organization, did not care for me selling the ‘good’ TV, but he understood why I did it,” she said of her second husband.

Her goal is to raise \$139,000 so she can buy the building from the owner, who is Black.

Among the things offered are after school tutoring, mentoring, jobs readiness, extra curricular activities, such as sports, and much more.

According to Latiker, on any given day, 30 to 50 young people show up at the center for help with their homework or just to hang out and go on field trips.



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