

# Worker reaches out

Former football player helps troubled youth

Nigel Levy's office is black, tattered and canvas. Inside, he carts stacks of pamphlets and information sheets on everything from HIV testing to how to get your criminal record cleared.

What's conspicuously absent is what you'd expect to find in the bag of a parks and recreation worker — gym clothes.

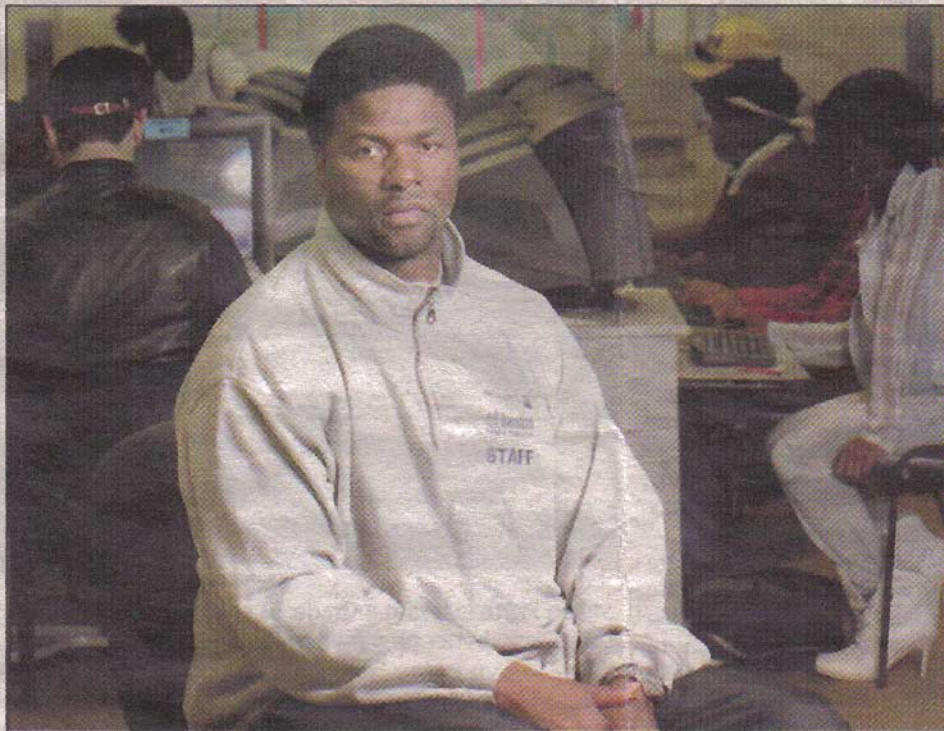
Levy is one of the city's 22 parks and recreation youth outreach workers.

But to hear his average work shift, you'd think he was trained in social work.

He helps teenagers in "G-Way" — the Galloway area of Scarborough — get into drug rehab programs, secure inexpensive child care for their kids, study for school, find jobs and complete their court-imposed community service. Right now, he oversees 50 young offenders serving out their sentences for first-time drug possession or petty theft.

"I don't replace a social worker," says Levy, a former professional football player.

"They're seen in a different light. Recreation isn't



KAZUYOSHI EHARA/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Nigel Levy is a recreational worker for the Galloway area in Scarborough.

scary to youth."

The city's parks and recreation department hired 10 youth outreach workers five years ago to address the plummeting youth enrolment in their programs.

Instead of waiting for teenagers to come and tell them what was missing, they sent Levy and others out into the city's poorer

neighbourhoods to ask them. And what they found was youth didn't just need basketball courts to blow off steam. They needed to know how to get a job, what to do about pregnant girlfriends, and how to deal with the schoolyard bully.

Since 2000, the number of youth outreach workers in the city has doubled, although

most work only part-time.

Levy left his job as a computer analyst to help kids.

"I say, you live and die quickly. I'm giving you the opportunity to dust your dreams off the shelf and asking what you want to be. They all have dreams but they've never been told they can succeed," Levy says.