

# Spider spins a web of hope for youth

## Pickering resident offers inspiration for kids in legal system

By Lesley Bowie  
Staff Writer

AJAX — Following your dreams can take you places you never imagined possible.

That was the message former boxer and now radio show host Chuck 'Spider' Jones delivered, like a knockout punch, Wednesday afternoon at the Durham Family Court Clinic (DFCC) annual general meeting.

"Education is very important. Anyone who tells you it's not, they're the damn fools, not you," he told a room full of DFCC members, youth clients and sponsors.

"Your weapon is this," added Mr. Jones, pointing to his head.

Years ago, the one-time gang member said he never dreamed he'd have his own radio show on CFRB today or be co-hosting a boxing TV show on ESPN with George Chuvalo.

Mr. Jones, a three-time former Golden Glove Champion, was inducted into the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame in 1998. Most recently, the Pickering resident was named the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' first ambassador to promote skilled trades to high school students.

"His personal story speaks directly to our youth," DFCC board member Jim Bradfield said in his introduction of Mr. Jones. "Its themes parallel both our agency's work and our youths' struggle."

DFCC is a local non-profit charitable community service agency serving needs of children, youth and families before the courts in Durham Region.

One of 11 kids, Mr. Jones spoke about his childhood, spent growing up in a small, cold house his grandfather built in Windsor, where six slept to a bed. At the age of five, he lost his 18-month-old brother to an illness. It was a day, he said, that changed his life "completely".

Awakened by his mother's screams and watching his father weep for the first time, Mr. Jones began having nightmares. Unable to sleep, he often spent his



SPIDER JONES  
Head is your 'weapon'.

school, where he was often teased and bullied.

In Grade 3, Mr. Jones was diagnosed with a severe learning disability and began stealing the lunches from his classmates because he never ate at home.

"I started rebelling against my parents, big-time," he said. "I used to hate being in that house. I hated school. I didn't know where I was going."

He began hanging-out on street corners with his cousin, who was vice-president of a youth gang, until eventually he was breaking into homes and sent to a detention centre. His parents sent him to Detroit to live with his aunt but he continued to be in gangs there.

"I lost my first cousin and closest friend. He was shot in the head over a girl," Mr. Jones said.

After wasting six years in jail, Mr. Jones did "Joe jobs" and later moved to Toronto. At age 28, he met his wife, who inspired him to follow his dream of being a DJ and going back to school. With only a Grade 3-level education behind him, enrolling in Seneca College's radio and television program was more frightening than all of his 80 amateur boxing matches, he said.

"I left Seneca an honour student," Mr. Jones said, proudly.

Today, through the DFCC, Jason and Gilbert (not their real names) are both attending DFCC's collaborative day treatment program, which is preparing them for reintegration into high school.

After only two-and-a-half months in the program, Jason said he has a new-found admiration for teachers.

"There's less stress because there's only seven of us in the classroom and we get all the attention

you need," he explained.

Youth are referred to the program through their probation officers or community service workers and learn different strategies for dealing with pres-

sures at school and in their lives, said program manager Karen Augustine.

"(Length of stay) depends on who the youth is," she added. "Some are with the program for three

years. It's all about how ready they are."

Gilbert, who has been in the program since November, said he's learned to respect others.

"For people with prob-

lems like me, it's really helped out because there is also anger management," he pointed out.

For information about DFCC, visit [www.dfcc.org](http://www.dfcc.org) or contact 905-436-6754.