

Grade 7 students say Westbrook's presentation was 'awesome'

www.insidehalton.com | MILTON CANADIAN CHAMPION | Thursday, April 2, 2015 | A&L2

A&L she felt when her parents divorced when she was in Grade 7.

She recalled an incident when a school jock shouted a rude term her way in a crowded school playground one recess.

"When you get a compliment it feels good," she said. "But that one disrespectful thing you hear — that's what you think about more and what you remember."

She told students that they have the power to stop that negative thinking. "At home and at school, when everything's falling apart, we have to support ourselves and one another."

She told students they have to respect themselves before they can respect others.

"You're taught the important character traits all your life: be caring, kind, compassionate and loving," she said, but added that's not always easy. "For me, I choose to respect myself, others and my dreams."

"I open my mind before I open my mouth," she said. "I walk away from conversations when people are disrespecting others."

Still, she admitted she still worries about what people will think of her.

"I still get butterflies," said Westbrook, who's been sharing her message with students for 14 years.

She said she was always accused of being "too nice," as though that were a bad thing.

"That's crazy talk," she said. "I'd rather be someone who's too nice."

Opening a yellowed, barely-legible note she received from a fellow seventh grader, she read aloud how that bullied girl thanked Sara for her kindness. "Thank you for not making fun of me," she read. "That's something you shouldn't have to be thankful for."

Westbrook sang *I Am Somebody* as she told students that it's not always easy to override the negative, but it gets easier with time and finding a way to release your feelings; in her case, she journals.

For Grade 7 students Izzy Trevisan and Iwi Eghobamien, Westbrook's message was taken to heart.

"I liked her a lot," said Izzy. "It was an awesome presentation."

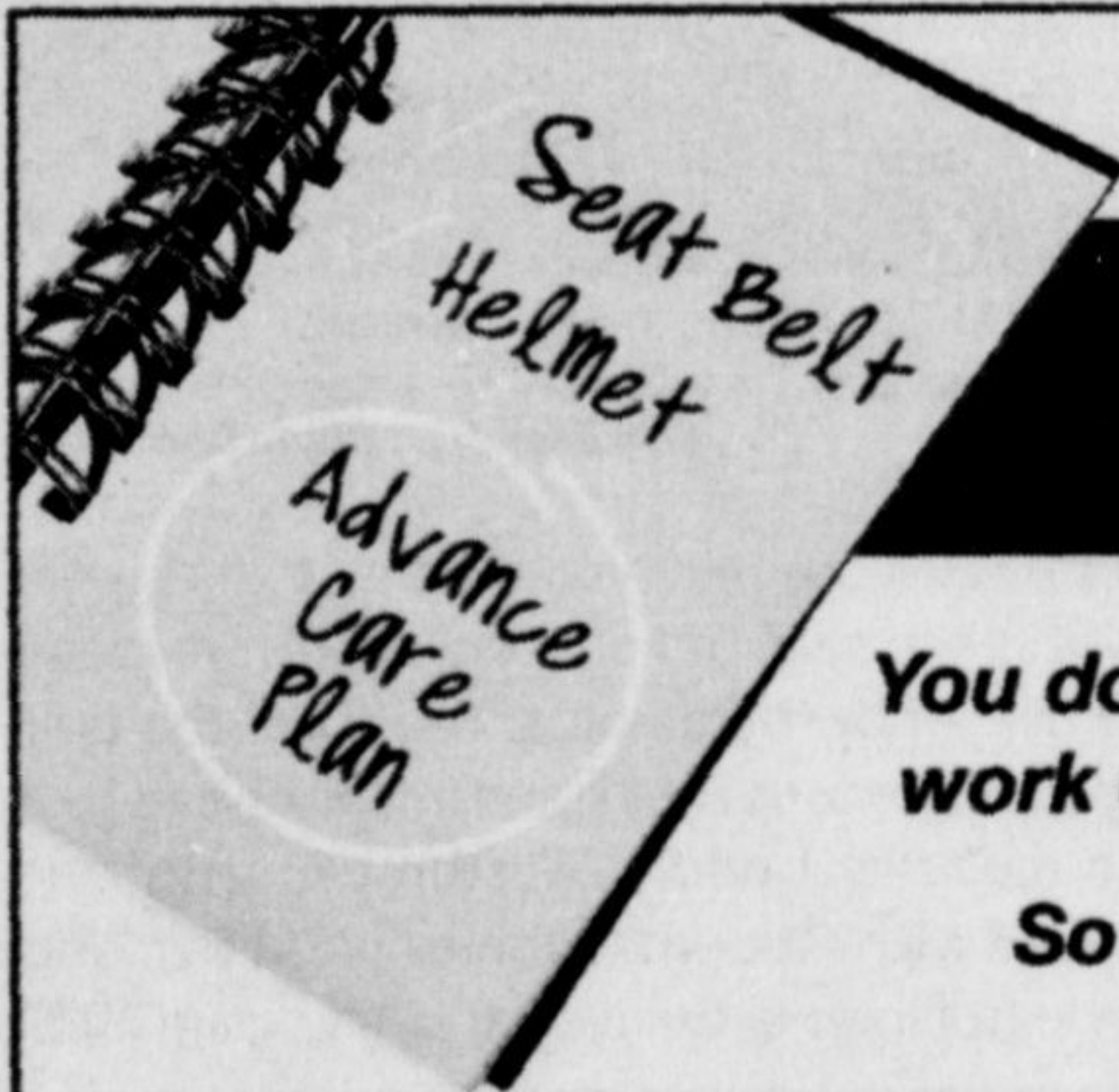
Echoed Iwi: "It was so awesome. The stories... I listened to every word and it was so empowering. I'm going to remember what she said." Westbrook said she wants youth to know they're not alone and they may not always have control over everything that happens in their lives. They have the power to choose how they act and react though.

"I call this power our UPower!"

Julie Slack can be reached at jslack@miltoncanadianchampion.com or on Twitter @miltonmusing.



Sara Westbrook dances during her UPower Concert at Guardian Angels Catholic Elementary School last week. *Julie Slack / Canadian Champion*



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