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## Allies in Action at John Dryden Public School



Grade 7 girls learn tangible tools to build resilience through Girls Inc. program.

**By Sarah Racioppa**

This September, Grade 7 girls at John Dryden Public School in Whitby began their journey to stronger relationships within themselves, and with others.

"We're teaching them that you don't need to love your ally, but you need to respect them," says Tracey McCannell, Director of Programming at Girls Inc. of

Durham.

Girls Inc. of Durham is an official partner of the Durham District School Board (DDSB) and offers various age-specific programs designed for a school setting. The 8-week program running at John Dryden PS is called 'Allies in Action.' This program teaches girls how to positively navigate social situations and overcome relational aggression.

Brianna Capone, Facilitator at Girls Inc. of Durham says, "We talk about friendships and how to identify those friends that will give you mutual respect." Girls Inc. uses metaphorical activities such as 'Bricks' and 'Pennies' to demonstrate peer respect and how to identify those who are not offering mutual respect.

**Protect the Loonie**

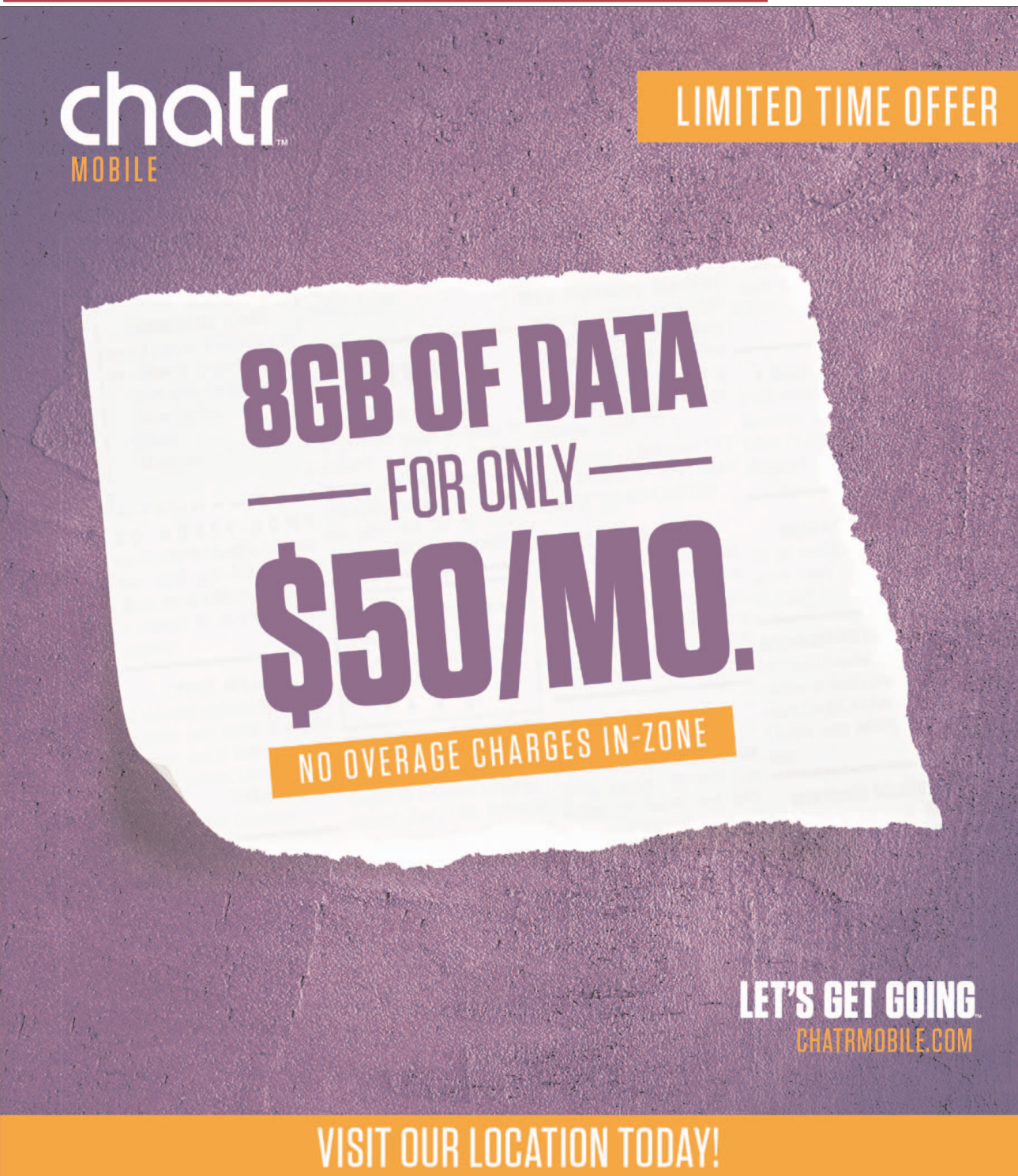
In the Bricks activity, girls pass around a real brick which represents words. "If I wrote 'stupid' on the brick and threw it at someone, we ask, 'how would that make her feel?' It would hurt her mentally and physically. It's a metaphor to say that our words hurt even though we don't see the physical impacts of it," explains Capone.

In the Pennies activity, girls feel the weight of 100 pennies, four quarters, and one

loonie. "It's hard to do things with 100 pennies in your hands," says Capone. This metaphor explains that there can be three types of relationships. Someone who is a 'penny' friend may be weighing you down and not giving you mutual respect. A 'quarter' friend is less heavy to carry, but may not be the person you share secrets with. Whereas a loonie is only one, and therefore much more noticeable if lost. "You want to protect that loonie, so you treat them with the same respect."

John Dryden PS is dual-track, which means both French Immersion and English students attend the school. "It's been amazing, especially because we have girls in French Immersion and English who never would have interacted, and they're opening up to each other every week," says Denise Robinson, Vice-Principal at John Dryden PS.

Allies in Action runs a morning and afternoon session every Tuesday in the library. Girls Inc. of Durham is also running a literacy program for girls in Grades 1 and 2 called GirlSTART which helps to increase literacy skills and self-esteem in young girls. Both programs will run until November 13.



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