

## Kids spend summer melting away pounds

### Weight-loss camp in San Marcos provides hope

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SAN MARCOS, Texas (KXAN) - Having fun shooting hoops was not what Heather Hodge, 13, envisioned when her mom suggested weight-loss camp. The 8th grader from Austin was struck with fear.

"I really didn't want to change that much from what my daily routine was," said Heather. "I was like, 'oh my gosh,' are they gonna feed me?"

Her expectations were quickly replaced when she arrived at [Wellspring Camp](#) in San Marcos. Heather has been more active than ever in the last four weeks.

"I've lost a couple pounds, which is really good, but I've also been gaining a lot of muscle," said Heather, while looking down at her arms.



Catherine Changos (far right) in dance class at Wellspring weight-loss camp in San Marcos

Heather's parents saw the camp as a solution for the constant struggle at home.

"It takes the pressure off the parents," said Dawnette Hodge, Heather's mother. "Because we were feeling bad about ourselves as parents, feeling like we were always nagging, nagging nagging."

Behavior coaches work with each child to help them set personal weight-loss goals they can achieve. Staff members become mentors. They engage the kids in a variety of physical activities such as kayaking,

mountain biking, swimming, disc golf, basketball and dance classes.

"We know if we can get them engaged in activities, and find something that they like, then they'll carry that out for the lifelong," said Wellspring Program Director Lora Tilson, who struggled with weight herself for many years.

Personal pedometers ensure the kids take at least 10,000 steps a day, which starts with a 3-mile walk. Along with activities, comes structure and food education in a non-judgmental environment. Culinary classes teach the children how to cook healthy meals once they go home. Each child documents their diet in a food journal.

Catherine Changos, 10, from Buda said she stands out from her skinny family and friends. She wants the criticism from classmates to stop.

"Some of them would tease me about my weight and say, 'oh my god, you're heavy' and it would make me sad, said Catherine. "And I would go home crying."

Now, Catherine is all smiles after her first four-week session. She has shed 16 pounds. The fast food she used to beg her parents to eat, is out of the question.

"From the movies I've watched so far, I'm like 'eww ok, nevermind, I'm not gonna eat there again'...I'm not even gonna talk about it," said Catherine.

Tilson said the average weight loss each week is 4.25 pounds. The average weight-loss over a four-week session is 20 pounds, and more than 30 pounds after eight weeks.

Some of the weight loss is dramatic. Josh Hunter, 17, of Corpus Christi weighed 380 pounds when he showed up last summer. His doctor told him, if he did not change his lifestyle soon, he was going to die. He dropped 53 pounds during his first eight-week session, and came back for round two this summer 115 pounds lighter.

"It's all up here," said Josh pointing to his head. "I was just tired of being the fat kid."

The children are well on their way to avoiding becoming a statistic. Texas holds the 14th highest obesity rate in the country, according to a study just released by [Trust for America's Health \(TFAH\)](#) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#).

Parents of the campers come to San Marcos and spend the final three days together. It gives the group a chance to learn how to help the family help carry out the lifestyle changes the children have been taught. For some, it is the first time in a long time, the challenge seems reachable.

"When I'm at home I can lose much, much more," said Catherine. "And be happy with myself."