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My big, fat summer holiday

America's latest smash-hit TV drama is *Huge* – literally. It's set at a fat camp for overweight teens, all desperate to slim down. Alice Groves, 14, has just spent her school holiday at Britain's first ever weight-loss boot camp for young people. At 15st 3lb and 5ft 7in, she had a BMI of 33.4 and was classed as obese. Here, she shares her diary...

05/09/2010

Friday, July 16



Pre-camp nerves...hope everyone's friendly!

I can't take being the funny fat girl any more. I'm sick of being called "Shrek" by other kids; of people staring because of my size; of being a size 18. But I'm not lazy and I don't gorge on junk food. You've no idea how many diets I've tried. I lose weight, then put it all back on again - and some. I'm just not built 'thin'.

But I worry that people think I'm a greedy slob. Girls my age are the worst. I'm paranoid that they're staring at my body all the time. So I'm going to fat camp - where teens like me go to get thin. Well, thinner, I hope.

I don't want to be skinny, I just want to look normal and be able to wear fashionable clothes, instead of hiding in tent-sized tops. Mum contacted Wellspring UK, a company that runs weight-loss camps and booked me in. At £4,100, it's really expensive, but I got a grant and my family has helped pay the remaining fee. It's extreme, but I hope it works. We're going tomorrow. I've never been away from home on my own, so I'm nervous and excited. I'm not after a miracle, I just want to feel better about myself.

Saturday, July 17

I'm here! I welled up a bit when we arrived but, thankfully, I held back my tears - unlike Mum, who was sobbing. How embarrassing! As soon as I met the staff and the other campers I felt more relaxed. Everyone's lovely.

The Wellspring camp is on the university campus in Exeter. There's a large main building and dormitories, but I've got a double room to myself, which is ace. I can listen to music on my iPod and have stuck pictures of my family on the wall. There's loads of outside space and a sports centre 10 minutes away. We've been put into groups: mine's the Pixies, which is all girls my age. Hope I make friends

Everyone's weighed and measured and, while I'm not the thinnest, I'm not the biggest. I'm kind of in the middle, which is reassuring. For dinner, we have chicken with rice and green beans, and jelly for pudding. It's actually really nice - and I feel full! I was worried it would be one lettuce leaf and two slices of cucumber.

Tuesday, July 20

I feel excited about each day and, unlike at school where I'm so self-conscious, here I'm fine about putting on my sports clothes, because everyone's in the same boat.

We go on a walk before breakfast, then do activities like hockey and basketball during the day. I love it. I used to play netball and go swimming, but I did them less as I got fatter, then stopped altogether. I'm enjoying eating differently and am not missing my Chinese takeaways. Here, I have scrambled egg on toast for breakfast, soup for lunch and chicken for tea. I feel fitter already and I'm sure my legs look thinner.

Sunday, July 25

I've lost just over 5lb in a week! I was so nervous when I got on the scales, but then my group leader read out my weight and I almost cried I was so happy. Yesterday, we did a one-mile run to measure our fitness levels. I did it in 11 minutes, 10 seconds. Not bad! It's the perfect end to a great week. I've made new friends and won an award for averaging 10,000 steps a day (we all wear pedometers, so every step we take is counted). I'm knackered, but in a good way.

Sunday, August 1



Cards and photos on my wall kept me going

I'm a bit homesick. I got a letter from Mum saying how proud she is, which made me cry. I miss her so much and we're only allowed one 10-minute phone call home a week.

But I've lost another 4lb. That's 10lb 3oz in total! My jeans feel loose. It's silly, but I've got this really definite idea of what I want to wear when I lose enough weight: a long, tight top over skinny jeans with Ugg boots. For the first time ever, it doesn't seem like an impossible dream.

We did raft building this week - everyone got soaked and it was so funny! There's one really nice boy here called Mike* - we get on well, and he's invited me to his bar mitzvah in Manchester. I've never felt awkward around boys. At school, all the girls are skinny so it's them I'm nervous around. Being with the girls on camp has made me feel good. I'm enjoying their company and they don't judge me. Maybe because they know how it feels to be like me

We all have a behaviour coach, a bit like a mentor, who we can go and talk to if we're craving pizza although, weirdly, I haven't - probably because I never feel hungry.

Sunday, August 8

I've only lost 1lb this week. Gutted. But my coach had warned me my weight loss would plateau. It's really frustrating because I'd worked so hard.



Out walking before breakfast...in the wind!

We've been having weekly CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) sessions. This week, I talked about how I'm not that close to my dad, who split up with my mum 11 years ago. I went to see him last year. Before that, I hadn't seen him since I was three. I don't think that's got anything to do with my weight - I don't comfort eat or anything - but it felt good to talk.

Only a week of camp left. Everyone's getting a bit emotional - we've all been on such a journey. I wrote a pledge to make myself and my family proud. I'll look at it whenever I'm tempted to fall back into my old habits.

Saturday, August 14

I'm back home! There was a leaving ceremony and disco last night. We got certificates and our team leaders read tributes. Mine said: "Alice will be leaving with lots of new friends. She's worked hard throughout." I went to bed on a high.

The look on Mum's face when she picked me up was brilliant. She couldn't stop staring! I've lost 16lb and dropped from a size 18 to a 14! I weigh 14st 1lb now. I've lost four inches from my waist and eight from my hips. But I want to lose another 7lb and get to a size 12.

When I got home, the first thing I did was try on my school uniform. And yay - it's way too big! We're going shopping to buy a new one tomorrow.

I know it's up to me to keep going - and I will. Next year, I want to go back to camp as a mentor to help other kids.

A month ago, I was fat and miserable. Now I'm healthier, more confident and two sizes smaller. Seems there really is more to me than my weight. I knew it!

Alice's mum Zoe, 40, says: "Alice is totally transformed. She's so much more confident and self-assured. I'm so proud of her. Not every teenager would have the courage to accept they need help - I'll support her all the way."

For more information, visit Wellspringcamp.co.uk.

Alice's diet before:

Breakfast: Two slices of wholemeal toast with butter and jam

Lunch: Large baked potato with butter and beans

Snack: Toffee Crisp or packet of crisps

Dinner: Two portions of spaghetti Bolognese

Supper: Ham sandwich Once a fortnight: McDonald's chicken sandwich meal with a banana milkshake. Once a month: Chinese takeaway - large portion of egg fried rice, chow mein and chicken in black bean sauce

Alice's fat camp diet:

Breakfast: Scrambled eggs, wholemeal toast, fat-free yoghurt

Lunch: Salad and soup, fruit

Dinner: Chicken, rice and green beans; jelly and low-fat custard

AS TOLD TO EIMEAR O'HAGAN AND ALI CRONIN PHOTOGRAPHY: ALICIA CLARKE STYLING: CARA SOLOMAN HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SARA BOWDEN ALICE WEARS CLOTHING FROM NEW LOOK

