

Meet Tanisha from "Too Fat for Fifteen"

A Maryland teen's struggle with weight has been documented on the Style Network

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Tanisha Mitchell, 17, from Style Network's "Too Fat for Fifteen: Fighting Back," doesn't view herself as a role model.

But after losing 176 pounds in eight months, the Prince George's County, Md., native has inspired thousands of teens across the country to start their own journey to self improvement.

"Too Fat for Fifteen," chronicles the lives of several teenagers at Wellspring Academies of the Carolinas in North Carolina. Wellspring is a year-round boarding school specifically for weight loss.

The Wellspring program focuses on a low-fat meal program, high levels of activity (about 10,000 steps a day) and most important to the students' successes - self awareness.

Tanisha said she had a starting weight of 510 pounds (making her the heaviest camper). She said through the program as and her strong determination and her willingness to make a life change, she was able to drop the weight.

She said she's now able to do things that most people take for granted, such as site seeing in Washington, D.C., and rock climbing, which are some of the challenges shown on the television series.

And because of her dedication to her weight loss, Tanisha has become a star.

"It's strange. People have actually looked up the address and sent me letters," she said in a telephone interview from Wellspring.



Prince George's County, Md., native Tanisha Mitchell, 17, attends Wellspring Academies of the Carolinas, a year-round boarding school specifically for weight loss. Tanisha and her classmates' struggles with weight loss have been documented on the Style Network's "Too Fat for Fifteen." (Credit: Courtesy of Style Network /)

Tanisha doesn't realize her effect on the viewers, even though cameras are constantly recording her life.

"It's still me sharing my journey and if people watching find it inspirational, it's worth it I guess," she said.

With wake-up time at 6 a.m. and the first activity before breakfast, students have a packed schedule including academics, personal training, group sports, electives and study hall.

They also have group therapy, which gives students a chance to learn the steps to ensure that their successes go beyond their time at the school.

"It's stressful here, and so it's nice to know you have a group to go to where you can just let it all out and know that you can trust that nobody's going to say anything else," Tanisha said.

Tanisha is most looking forward to finishing the program and continuing her self-growth.

"I never want to get to a point where it's just 'OK, I'm good here' like, 'I don't want to go any farther.' I never want to get to that point so I guess I look forward to continuing on my journey and continuing to do my best," she said.

Going home for the summer or spring break can be hard for the kids to stay on program, but Tanisha missed her family more than the high-calorie temptations that are normally controlled when at the academy.

"I think when I first left for the summer (I went home for the summer), I was nervous about not being able to get in all the activity that we can, but I was never nervous about the food," she said. "I have absolutely no desire to go back to what I was, so it was no problem for me to stay on program."

After facing the challenge of being away from her family for so long, the grueling schedule of Wellspring and the new found title of role model, Tanisha's next challenge is to realize a dream of hers - becoming a lawyer.

"It's always hard to take the first step when you know that you have to change your life," she said, "but if you can somehow find the courage to do it - every step after will get easier."