

## **Rialto teen continues workout regimen**

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Though he still is battling obesity and associated medical problems, Able Richardson's life doesn't appear as bleak as it did in May.

At that time, Able's body and mind were failing him. And, academically, he wasn't achieving to his grade level.

Today, the 16-year-old Wilma Amina Carter High School student is 32 pounds lighter, improving his grades and possibly headed for a semester or two at a therapeutic boarding school for obese teens.

And he continues a strenuous workout regimen at a Rialto gym three or four times a week, despite joint problems caused by his weight.

"He's working out, eating better and isn't as tired as he used to be. He's doing great," said Jean Myers, Able's mother. "He's one of three kids up for a \$10,000 grant for one semester at the Academy of the Sierras. We're just waiting."

Located in Reedley, the Academy of the Sierras is a year-round residential weight-loss program for obese teens ages 13 to 18.

The program has three components:

Comprehensive diet and activity management;

Intensive behavioral training for successful long-term weight control and any psychological or emotional barriers to mastering weight control; and

An academic program to help students accelerate.

Ryan Craig, executive director of the school, said each student has access to a social worker, doctor and dietitian.

Additionally, the students undergo therapy four times a week twice in a group setting and twice individually.

"What we've learned is kids don't get to be 100 pounds overweight unless there is something wrong," Craig said earlier this year. "Stress, or coping with other issues in life, could cause kids to eat. That's why we need to do the therapy, to replace the unhealthy coping with some positive reinforcement."

Though the school is pricey, about \$5,500 per month, Craig said students are losing, on average, about four pounds a week.

But, more important, they are making behavioral changes that can keep that weight off.

"We see amazing improvements in physical fitness levels as well as changes in their behavior," he said. "Essentially, they become normal teens."

In May, Able weighed more than 540 pounds, and he and his parents were actively seeking bariatric surgery.

In June, The Blitz gym owners, Vernal and Janette Townsend, offered Able free membership and access to a personal trainer to help him with his weight problems.

Myers said she and Able expect to hear from the Academy of the Sierras this week about the scholarship.