



**ANDERSON COOPER 360**

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COOPER: All this week, we're looking at dieting in America, in particular, some of the inspiring stories of people who have lost weight and kept it off. Tonight, we are looking at an innovative way of helping kids fight obesity.

But first, the numbers. The CDC says the percentage of overweight young people has more than tripled over the past 25 years. So the problem is very real. The question is what to do about it? CNN's Gary Tuchman looks at a radical experiment to try to change that trend.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

GARY TUCHMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): When getting to this isolated location in California's San Joaquin Valley, it's easy to lose your way. But once there, the time has come to find your way.

(on camera): How much did you weigh when you came?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Two hundred and twenty.

MAL MAHEDY, ACADEMY OF THE SIERRAS STUDENT: I weighed 322 pounds.

TERRY HENRY, ACADEMY OF THE SIERRAS STUDENT: I weighed 591 pounds at my peak.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): These are teenagers who in a sense have become weight loss pioneers in a brand new program.

RYAN CRAIG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACADEMY OF THE SIERRAS: Academy of the Sierras is a first year-round treatment program for obese and overweight adolescents, and we do it in a boarding school environment.

TUCHMAN: Jarrod Fitzpatrick (ph) is 13, from Illinois. He is the boy who used to weigh 220.

(on camera): How much do you weigh right now?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: One hundred and thirty-eight.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): Mal Mahedy is 17 from Florida. She's the one who weighed 322. She's lost 130 pounds, coming here after a debilitating sophomore year of high school.

MAHEDY: It was the most traumatic experience I have ever had. I -- it got to the point where I was being made fun of every day, and I just eventually quit school, and I had to be privately tutored.

TUCHMAN: And 16-year-old Terry Henry from New Hampshire is the teen who weighed 591. His life has been very difficult. But he's now lost 254 pounds.

(on camera): How were you able to even know how much you weighed? The scales don't go that high?

HENRY: I got on a cattle scale.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): They do their reading, writing and arithmetic here.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: And you're like giving us the wrong answer.

TUCHMAN: But the reason their families are paying a steep \$5,500 a month is because nothing else has worked in their efforts to lose weight.

(on camera): In a typical day, when you weighed 591 pounds, how much food did you eat?

HENRY: About 60,000 calories a day.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): About 2,000 calories a day is what the students here average, while eating three meals and two snacks. They're allowed no more than 12 daily fat grams.

They keep journals of what they eat and how they feel.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I'm still hungry, and it's after dinner. I wanted some more soft serve.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Cooking something does require coming up with a plan for it.

TUCHMAN: They learn how to prepare healthy foods with other kids who understand what they're going through.

(on camera): Did you know about nutritious foods before you took this class?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: No, not really. Like, I knew how to make macaroni and cheese.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): They're required to exercise every day. All students wear pedometers. Five miles of walking, 10,000 steps are required. (on camera): Do you carry a pedometer with you?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Yes.

TUCHMAN: And how many steps have you taken today?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Five thousand ninety.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): Privileges are taken away from anyone who ignores exercise and other requirements.

Fourteen-year-old Shari Lininger is challenging me to a one-on- one.

(on camera): Nice shot. You are the winner.

(voice-over): And challenging herself to lose more than the 82 pounds she has already shed, so she can pursue a singing career.

SHARI LININGER, ACADEMY OF THE SIERRAS STUDENT: I have a passion for that, and I knew that my weight would potentially keep me from doing that and keep me from being successful in that area of my life.

TUCHMAN (on camera): This class of 36 has lost a combined total of more than 2,400 pounds. Almost all of the kids say they have zooming confidence levels.

But what happens when they get back in the real world where there are lots of fast food restaurants and menacing high school classmates?

(voice-over): Those types of questions are addressed in behavioral classes here, which may be the most important lessons of all.

MOLLY CARMEL, DEP. CLINICAL DIRECTOR, ACADEMY OF THE SIERRAS: It would be nearly impossible for them to do anything if they didn't change the behaviors that they came in with.

TUCHMAN: Terry says he has become disciplined and motivated.

HENRY: If it definitely wasn't for this place, I would probably be dead right now. Seriously. I mean, I was one of the biggest human beings in the world. I'd like to get my weight around 200 pounds.

TUCHMAN (on camera): So that means you still have about another 137 to go, right?

HENRY: Yep.

TUCHMAN: You think you'll make it?

HENRY: I know I'll make it.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): Experts not affiliated with the school say the families are a key to these teenagers succeeding. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Things have to change at home. So while the child's away, the family really needs to implement some major changes as well.

TUCHMAN: The school says it is training the parents, as its first group of eight students goes home for good this week. And while we are there, a goodbye ceremony for those leaving.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I love you, and everybody, I love you all. And I'll miss you so much.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I'm ready to use the skills which I have been taught for the past nine months. I'm ready to start my life again and to succeed this time.

TUCHMAN: Terry is not leaving yet. He has more weight to lose, but he received an award for being so inspirational.

As for Shari, who is going home, her voice elegantly conveys her feelings about her classmates.

LININGER (singing): And I will remember you. Will you remember me? Don't let your life pass you by, weep not for the memory.

(END VIDEOTAPE)