



Fat camp is helping over-weight youngsters fulfill their dreams

[Jul 20 2009](#) By Heather Greenaway

VALENTINA DUNN would love to be a dancer, while Luca Santangeli fantasises about scoring a try for Scotland.

The only obstacle standing in the way of their dreams is their weight.

But thanks to a pioneering weight-loss camp, the Scots youngsters are tackling the problem head on and are a step closer to fulfilling their ambitions.

Valentina, 14, from Glasgow, and Luca, 12, from Edinburgh, have been taking part in the Wellspring UK programme for a week, but already the plucky kids have lost 21lb between them.

As well as a packed daily programme of calorie-burning activities such as hiking, camping, canoeing and running, the youngsters also get one-to-one therapy sessions and group sessions to help them understand their weight problem.

Valentina, who has shed a stone in the last seven days, said the camp has transformed her life.

The bubbly teenager said: "I'm having the time of my life and I've only been here a week. Losing so much weight has given me a huge boost and I can't wait to lose more.

"I've always been big for my age. I just have to look at food and the weight piles on, but I'm sick of being a big blob.

"This summer is my chance to change and I'm determined not to let it slip through my fingers. I know I can go all the way now and can't wait to unveil the new me at the end."

Tipping the scales at 14 stone, far more than the recommended weight for her 5ft 5in, Valentina knew it was time to take her weight in hand.

She said: "My parents and sister found out about the camp and asked me if I wanted to go.

"At first, I was upset they were even suggesting I needed to lose weight, but then I realised they were only doing it because they loved me and I agreed to go along.

"I've always dreamed of being a performer, but my weight has been holding me back. I need to be thinner if I want to take my dancing on to the next level."

Valentina, who is sick of people calling her names, said her mum cried when she phoned to tell her about her weight loss.

She said: "When the lady at the camp weighed me, I laughed out loud when she told me I had lost just under a stone. I thought she was joking.

"I phoned my mum with the news and she just cried.

"Before I started at Wellspring, I was wearing size 14/16 clothes. If I reach my target weight of 10 stone, I will be able to wear size 10/12 for the first time."

Luca, who has lost 8lb since going to the Somerset camp, is also a fan of the programme's tough regime, which requires them to walk at least 10,000 steps a day. The Stewart's Melville College pupil, who is moving up to the senior school in August, has been trying to lose weight for months.

Last week, the 5ft 1in schoolboy weighed 11 stone.

Luca said: "I've tried to lose weight before but nothing has ever worked. My mum read about the camp in a magazine and asked me if I wanted to try it out.

"I said yes, as I'm going into first year and want to play rugby. At the minute, I'm not fast enough and I don't want to be left out of the team.

"I was told I had dropped eight pounds by having fun, playing sports and eating healthy food."

Luca's mum, Gillian, 38, is proud of her son and his weight loss.

She said: "Luca is determined and once he puts his mind to do something, he gives it his all.

"He has been called some cruel names in the past, but he just gets on with it. Hopefully, losing weight will give him more confidence.

"They are only allowed to make two calls home a week, but each time Luca has phoned he has seemed on top of the world. I'm so pleased he made up his mind to go to the camp."

Obesity is a problem which has reached epidemic proportions among Scots kids and record numbers are fat or obese.

Wellspring UK is the seventh camp opened by the US company.

Valentina and Luca are in the hands of a team of experts, specially trained to help youngsters change their body shape, eating habits and the way they think about food.

Programme director Mike Crowther said: "Wellspring UK changes behaviours for a newfound healthy lifestyle.

"We teach campers how to approach diet and exercise so, when they leave us, they are equipped to make healthy choices. This is the busiest year for us yet and the need for our programme is apparent."

You have to be at least 20lb over weight to qualify for the £5000 camp, but some kids weigh 24 stone, two stone lighter than the 26 stone limit for students.

The Calorie King, a pocket calorie, fat and carbohydrate counter, and a daily journal become the kids' Bibles, helping them stick to a maximum of 1200 calories a day.

Kids are also shown how to cook low-fat meals and a pedometer helps them hit the 10,000 minimum steps a day.

Luca said: "I've been playing tennis, going for hikes and even canoeing. It's such fun and the cookery classes have been great.

"I don't eat that much unhealthy food, but it was my portion sizes that were the problem. I now know to eat more zero calorie food to fill me up. I've always had a soft spot for pizzas but, thanks to advice from the chef, I now know how to make a healthier version." Valentina said: "My mum always makes sure I have a healthy meal at night but my weakness was chocolate. For the past week, I haven't craved anything and I haven't been hungry. I feel happier than I have in a long time and know that losing weight is the key to my dreams."

For details about Wellspring Camps log on to www.wellspringcamp.co.uk