

## From baby steps to life-changing strides: Lifestyle management program gives a mother a new lease on life



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### A LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT STORY

Wanting to end her lifelong struggle with obesity, Carmen Vardich was looking for some guidance to get her life back on track. She gained so much weight that her young son couldn't even wrap his arms around her for a hug. Devastated by this, she decided to take action.

It was time to get help, but who could she trust to give the right advice along the way? Kim Allen, a Nationwide Better Health<sup>SM</sup> health coach, fostered a unique connection that changed Vardich's life forever.

The day Allen was assigned to Vardich's case, she wanted to make sure every detail was taken into consideration before providing her client with the appropriate health coaching, dietetic advice and lifestyle management help. "When I first called Carmen, she had multiple things going on besides her issue with weight, so it was important that I understood where she was coming from," says Allen.

Many elements in Vardich's life factored into her health situation, but Allen listened patiently to every scenario. Not only was her client overweight, but she didn't feel good about herself and was saddened at the state of her life. Allen took the information and implemented a customized program, which introduced positive choices to her client's lifestyle.

"I found out Carmen used a parking garage at her work," says Allen. "We started by using the stairs in the garage, while adding more flights over periods of time. Gradually, we increased her activity and also made changes with her diet, like finding out where we could decrease the amount of fried foods, cut out sodas and increase her intake of fruits and veggies."

Vardich lost 50 pounds over the first 12 months. Eventually, she lost nearly 90 pounds and dropped 10 dress sizes. She continues to follow Allen's routine in an effort to lose more weight. What could've been just an ordinary coaching session became a transformational experience when compassion came into the picture.

"I try to focus on developing a personal and strong relationship with people," says Allen. "I also try to give sympathetic and empathetic guidance when helping them get to where they want to be. Some people think that you can't develop a relationship over the phone – but Carmen and I probably developed one of the strongest relationships you can between two people."

Other health care programs can be very impersonal, yet Allen's warm and friendly approach is a breath of fresh air to all that receive her guidance. "This is not just a job to me, because every morning I look forward to getting up and going to work," says Allen. "I get such personal satisfaction from helping people."

Even a stranger can turn the most difficult situation into a blessing. Vardich may have lost a tremendous amount of weight during the lifestyle management program, but she gained a wonderful friend during the process.

"I have the utmost respect and appreciation for her and consider her one of my very best friends," says Vardich. "Though the program ended some time ago, I still find myself practicing what Kim taught me."

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**-Carmen Vardich, referring to her  
health coach, Kim Allen**