

## **WARF Success Story: Sarah Sitterle**

### **Background**

I had a wakeup call about a year ago that made me re-evaluate everything. I was at a point where my poor health was having an effect on my family and I knew some serious changes had to be made. I have struggled for over 20 years as an adult with being seriously overweight and have tried just about every fad diet and exercise plan out there. I was so used to starting a new plan and failing that I had pretty much given up that anything would work for me. I would like to say the changes had instantaneous results. Truth is, there is no fast way to transform your health and body, but I have found the process is well worth the effort.

This is what worked for me and can work for you too!

- **Commit**
  - I had to make a decision to place my health at the top of my priority list and not compromise. I had to find a reason to make permanent changes. I realized (finally!) that no one was going to do it for me and I am worth it. I decided once and for all to not let anyone change my mind or get in the way of my health goals.
- **Eat right**
  - I had to stop eating foods that have no nutritional benefit for me. I am allergic to or have an intolerance to eating several foods. It sounds simple enough, but when the food allergies involve every comfort food I loved growing up, it is easier said than done. I am allergic to wheat and dairy, and have an intolerance to eggs, soy, and corn. I had sort of been eating a dairy and gluten free diet up until this point, but would occasionally indulge, which made me feel sick. Because of this, I had to cut out processed foods and started to eat whole, natural foods and to cook for my family. I eat gluten free grains only on occasion, as most prepared baked goods and packaged foods have ingredients I am allergic to or intolerant to eating. I'm not fond of the gluten free products and do not bake, so it is easier for me to avoid them altogether. I still have sweets now and then, but they have real, natural ingredients.
  - I joined an online program to track my food intake and weight. I was able to see what impact my food choices had on my weight and health. It was very eye opening! I thought my eating was under control and I was so wrong. It became very motivating once I figured out the tips and tricks to maximize the effort.

- **Focus**
  - I decided that my health was more important than scale numbers, so I decided not to obsess about how much weight I wanted to lose. Instead, I focused on getting fit first and then the rest would follow.
- **Get moving**
  - It was April 2014 and my birthday was approaching in the next month. After receiving an email about the personal training sessions at the WARF, I decided to treat myself to six sessions. I thought if it didn't work out, it was no big deal. Little did I know how much my life was going to change for the better! I submitted the form for personal training and didn't select any one trainer because their descriptions in the brochure all seemed great. I was matched up with Mindi Cupka, and started a weight training program. She is so accepting and was nice to me, which made all of the difference starting out. I was not confident in my abilities, but she believed in me and encouraged me all along the way. Before I knew it, I had signed up for more sessions and was beginning to notice a change in myself. Not visible to anyone at first because it took a while for the physical changes to appear, but my outlook began to change and for the first time ever, I believed that the exercise and what I was doing was going to work.
  - A few months passed, and by the summer, Mindi encouraged me to think about running. At first I thought she was crazy, since I did not feel I was in shape enough to even consider it and had not run since high school (track and field – my favorite event was the 4 x 100 meter relay). The idea eventually caught on and I signed up for a "Couch to 5K" program through The Running Store in Gainesville that began in August. It was difficult at first, but slowly the running and walking training combination transitioned from minutes to miles. I signed up for and ran my first 5K in November 2014. I am currently training for my first half marathon. Now I am hooked on working out and it is difficult to miss a workout. I am motivated by how good I feel afterwards.
- **Support network and accountability**
  - I needed someone to be accountable to with my workouts so working with Mindi has been critical. Previous attempts to work out on my own proved to be problematic, so having someone to help keep me on track and accountable to my goals was extremely important. I have relied on friends to help me stay motivated too. Turns out, my friends have been inspired to make changes because of what I have done. Totally a bonus!

- **Believe**

- I had to redefine how I see myself. Having been a curvy girl my whole life and especially in adulthood, I saw myself in a negative way and believed all of the negative comments. I thought I was not worth the attempts to change. I had to totally change my attitude about me. This was the most difficult thing and I still struggle with thinking of myself as the fat girl with the good heart. I now know that I am stronger than I think, both mentally and physically. I have confidence now. These are what I like to call the 'tangible intangibles' that no one can take from me. If I can do this, I believe anyone can. It may not be the same journey as mine because getting healthy is somewhat unique for each person, but the decisions are the same.
- So far since I started in April 2014, I have lost 53 pounds. I was once considered morbidly obese for my height and weight. Not anymore. I have gained so much more than I ever thought possible. I feel like I've gained a whole new life!