

# Louise's story



**Louise was one of a number of parents who were told that their 11 year old daughter was overweight by school nurses last year.**

“At first I was really angry - it felt like they were saying I’d neglected my daughter or was stupid or something. Deep down I probably knew Sarah was quite big, but I didn’t think she looked any different from other children in her class and she was about to start secondary school which I thought would be worrying enough for her. So I just ignored the letter to start with.

But then I heard from the mum of one of her friends that the girls had been on the internet looking up how to lose weight. It made me realise that just because we didn’t talk about it didn’t mean Sarah wasn’t worried about her weight. And **if I didn’t try to help her with it, it wasn’t going to go away on its own.**

So, I took a deep breath and asked her if she wanted to help me try and make some changes to make the family a bit healthier. I never actually said ‘you’re overweight’ or told her that she needed to lose weight - I didn’t want to make her paranoid or risk giving her a complex by singling her out - so I just made it like a whole family thing.

What surprised me was that she seemed really relieved. She’s got quite into cooking with me and asking about what’s healthy and what’s not so healthy for her, so I’m really pleased she’s got that awareness now – even if she doesn’t always choose the healthiest option. Sarah also comes out to walk the dog with me some days which she never did before. We have quite nice chats actually when she does that.

Don’t get me wrong, it hasn’t all been easy. My younger kids are still a bit fussy and would just eat chicken nuggets and chips every day if I let them. I think trying to do things as a family has helped though – healthy is becoming our ‘new normal’. And nothing’s banned, they can have chocolate every now and again, it’s just balancing it. I like to cook from scratch so that I know what we’re eating is quite healthy but it can be a bit of a pain – making double quantities and freezing half for another day is a real lifesaver sometimes!

So yes, I think it’s working, and I’m really glad now that I did do something, and didn’t just leave Sarah to cope on her own. When I think about it, **there’s so much in our lives that doesn’t help us to be healthy** – all those junk food ads and computer games drawing kids in. But there are things we can do, it just took me a little while to realise that I could help Sarah to deal with it all, and hopefully help her to get back on track.”

*Louise*

A photograph of a person's legs from the knees down, wearing dark shorts and blue sneakers with white soles. The person is standing on a lush green grassy field. A soccer ball is visible in the lower-left corner of the frame. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Mark's story

**Mark was weighed as part of the National Child Measurement Programme in Year 6. The nurses were concerned he had some excess weight - enough for it to be bad for his health.**

**Mark already knew he was one of the heavier children at school before the measurement day came along** – not least because the other children sometimes teased him about it. He didn't really know whether or not it mattered for his health, or whether he could do anything about it as his parents never talked about weight at home. But his size made him feel bad and he thought it was probably also the reason why he couldn't keep up with his friends during Games . So although it was a bit embarrassing to be weighed at school, it was also quite a relief as he thought this would mean someone would help him to do something about it.

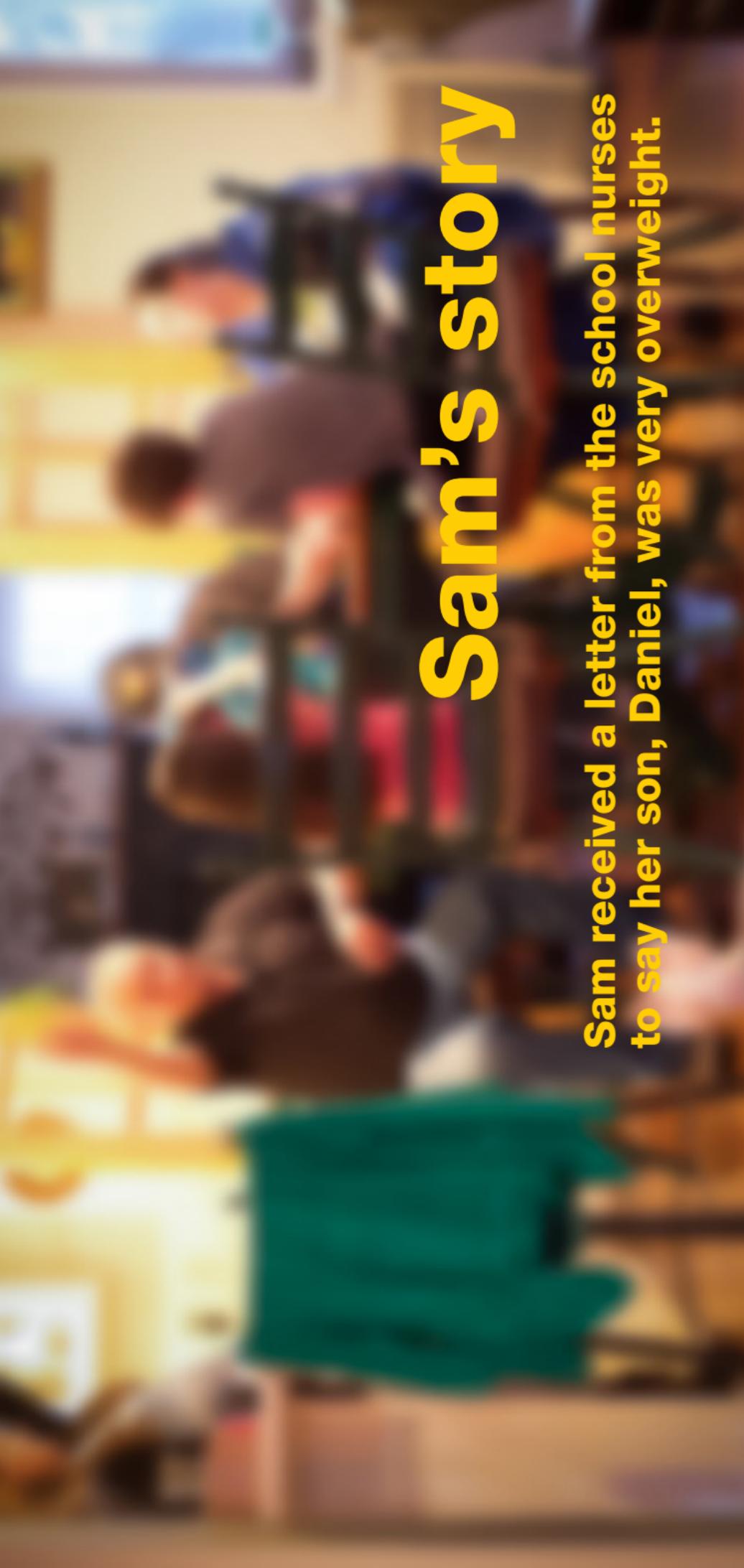
Mark was really disappointed then when his mum didn't mention his weight after the measurements in school, and he felt quite down about it. It seemed to him that being overweight was so shameful that no one was willing to mention it.

Things changed for the better after he got talking to his mum about healthy eating as part of his school homework one day. As they were chatting about food for the homework task, he admitted that he would like to eat more healthy things to try and lose some weight. His mum was really helpful and sat down with him to talk about what different things they could do.

One thing they decided to do was join a local course for children and their families who wanted to be healthier. He was a bit nervous about this, but found he really enjoyed it. **He liked the fact that he wasn't the 'big kid' any more - the others were just the same as he was.** The children on the course helped each other out a lot too, whether doing sports activities or learning to read food labels and so on. Even though he realised that he wouldn't lose lots of weight quickly, knowing that he was taking the first steps made him feel a lot more confident.

Mark's mum made some changes at home too for all the family. They didn't always like them, but his mum said, they hadn't always liked what she cooked for them anyway so it was no different!

*It's hard for many children to maintain a healthy weight – we live in a world full of temptations to eat more and be less active, so it's no wonder that one in three children in the UK are overweight. Many parents are concerned that involving their child in attempts to manage their weight could be harmful to their body image and self-esteem. However, talking about healthy lifestyles doesn't have to include talk about weight, and in fact research shows that encouraging your child to eat a more healthy diet and be active can actually improve their sense of wellbeing.*



# Sam's story

**Sam received a letter from the school nurses to say her son, Daniel, was very overweight.**

"We've always been quite big in our family - no one would look at Steve and me and think for a minute we'd have really skinny kids, so I guess we just didn't really notice when our middle son, Daniel, started to put on weight in primary school. He'd always been a bit chubby but I thought that was just normal at his age.

**When I got this letter telling me he was very overweight it was like a bolt from the blue**, and to be honest, I was really upset. I already thought I was doing all I could, making sure they all had some veg at dinner and didn't stay on the computer all night and all that, and I wasn't going to start being so strict that I made their lives miserable. Also, I suppose because I've struggled with my own weight all my life, I didn't really believe that anything I could do would make a difference - so it was better not to risk making him self-conscious about it.

It was my husband who snapped me out of it. I was going to slimming club at the time, so Steve said *'why don't we just do the healthy living stuff as a whole family?'*. I was determined that we wouldn't do anything drastic, and I absolutely didn't want to single Daniel out and make him feel different from the other kids. But as it was all of us, including his dad, doing things together, it felt alright.

Quite a few things I tried worked well actually, like having a fruit bowl out all the time so as they're walking past they just pick a piece of fruit, and they have some really good recipes at the slimming club too that I tried. I now make my own *popcorn chicken*, so I know there's not too much fat in it but the kids don't know it's any different from normal! Steve takes Daniel to Taekwondo now too, so he gets good exercise there - it surprised me that Daniel wanted to go as he's always been more of a computer child.

It's been hard, though, to find the right line between making the family healthier, and not making it a big 'thing'. I never said anything to Daniel about the letter, never said anything to suggest that we made these changes because of his weight. I know what it felt like to be told I was fat as a child.

**Daniel's 12 now, and I can't be in charge of what he eats or does every minute of the day anymore**, so we're just trying to do our best with talking about healthy eating and being active at home so at least he understands what the choices are. Actually, where he's at school now he buys his own lunch, he's choosing it, and it's interesting that although this means he *can* eat basically what he wants he normally chooses something quite healthy - so maybe it is working!"

Sam