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Loozit program shows results for teens

A WEIGHT-MANAGEMENT group for teenagers in Sydney's west is teaching overweight and obese teens how to cut down on junk food and get off the couch to improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Now in its third year, more than 120 children aged 13 to 16 have enrolled in the Loozit program at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, the first of its kind in Australia.

The nine-week intensive program emphasises making realistic and achievable lifestyle changes, such as choosing the healthier option when buying takeaway food. Parents attend

separate sessions to discuss how they can support their child, using strategies such as saying no to junk food and limiting portion size.

Tracey McGuire said her son Sam, now 14, was "a big boy" who was above the recommended body mass index for his age and had a penchant for video games.

After attending weekly sessions, Sam began making small changes - eating breakfast, cutting out full-fat milk and riding his bike three kilometres to school. He lost about 10 kilograms and his blood pressure and blood-sugar levels fell, putting him at less risk of developing a chronic disease such

as diabetes later in life. "I feel good and there's been less bullying," he said yesterday at the family's Baulkham Hills home.

A dietary expert this week floated the idea of notifying child protection authorities when parents were unwilling or unable to participate in programs such as Loozit. But the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies says the troubled Department of Community Services is already struggling to deal with cases of urgent harm and there is no room to include morbidly obese children in the protection system.

Louise Hall