Lair Christie can do anything. The kindergarten special needs teacher weighed 297 pounds at her heaviest. “I thought I was just meant to be fat,” Christie said. She didn’t think her diet was that bad, and any physical activity hurt.

Then, in January 2009, she was ready to start loving herself. At 282.8 pounds she started the Healthy Charleston Challenge with MUSC. She’s lost 124 pounds in almost three years and she’s not done.

Christie says she was overweight her whole life. She’d tried different approaches to weight loss, but only achieved small, temporary results. Christie’s friend and business mentor Julie Puchetti had just completed the Healthy Charleston Challenge, and she thought the accountability and group approach would work for Christie.

“Blair was ready. She was not happy at her present weight,” Puchetti said. “When she decides to embrace something, she goes all the way. ... She’s a go-getter when she makes up her mind and she knows what she wants.”

Christie embarked on the challenge with determination. Competition drove her to win and discover love for herself and pride in her health and fitness.

She lost around 60 pounds and won the 10-week challenge. Her team trainer, Katie St. Clair, continues to train Christie for free at MUSC.

“Blair was such an inspiration for so many people during the challenge,” St. Clair said. “I didn’t want to see her backslide. She was such a huge success, and it meant a lot to other people.”

Christie is still involved with the Healthy Charleston Challenge as well. She continues to speak to new challenge groups about

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Exceeding The Challenge

By Katie Orlando

“I thought I was just meant to be fat.”
- Blair Christie
the program that made a huge difference in her life.

MUSC Wellness Center Assistant Director Janis Newton calls Christie a poster child for the Challenge.

“It’s just empowered her as a person,” Newton said.

The complete approach program gives participants the tools to transform their lives, not just quick fixes. Along with a workout regimen, the Healthy Charleston Challenge includes weekly weigh-ins and nutrition classes.

“It taught me to really look at food as fuel for my body,” Christie said. “It taught me how to work out – that I was capable of doing a lot of things I never thought I could do before.”

Things like running a marathon. Christie ran the Myrtle Beach Marathon in 5 hours and 45 minutes.

Her first marathon reminded Christie of one of the hardest lessons she learned throughout her weight-loss training.

“Positive mental attitude is something you have to fight for,” Christie said. “The mental part of pushing through physical pain was the biggest challenge.”

She ran into that familiar mental obstacle around mile 23, and her trusty friend, mentor and motivator showed up to remind her she had the strength to finish.

“I was there to be an encourager at that point,” Puchetti said. “That’s what the challenge gave us – to never let us quit. ... I’m very proud of her. Sometimes people don’t see their own seeds of greatness within themselves, and it takes someone else to say, ‘I see this in you.’”

Christie fought through brutal workouts to get healthy, but it wasn’t all work. She found her exercise bliss in Tae Bo®, James Pushia teaches the combination of fighting and dance exercise at MUSC, and he’s earned Christie as a devotee.

“It’s a hard class, but I never had to make myself go,” Christie said.

The spiritual aspects of Tae Bo® also helped strengthen the mental aspects of Christie’s fitness transformation, the backbone of the whole process.

Christie trained with Tae Bo® founder Billy Banks in California and achieved instructor certification in July. She’ll begin teaching biweekly classes, paying forward the strength and inspiration she found in Pushia’s classes.

“Tae Bo® taught Blair to believe in herself,” Pushia said. “It helped her develop self-esteem and confidence. She saw that she could give back and help people.”

As a Tae Bo® instructor, Christie will be able to continue to share that inspiration and introduce even more people to the art.

“She’s already working with people who aren’t in good shape, don’t have that self-confidence, and inspiring them with her story, showing them that they can reach their goals,” Pushia said.

Christie works out every day and eats food that will give her strength instead of weighing her down. Along with running, Christie does cardio and weight training with St. Clair and Tae Bo® classes. Newton credits challenge nutritionist Judith Herrin with transforming participants’ approach to food. Christie says food journaling during the Healthy Charleston Challenge helped her see what she needed to change and to transform her nutrition. She keeps it simple, with lean proteins like chicken, steamed vegetables and home-made dressings. She swore off snacking straight from the container, and replaced junk with fruit, popcorn, almonds and “little things that satisfy that need” to munch.

After overcoming 124 pounds through daily effort, a quality support system and her very own mental and physical strength, there’s nothing Christie can’t take on, from physical challenges to business endeavors.

“It’s unlocking so many different areas of my life. I can do this, I can accomplish anything,” Christie said.

Follow Christie’s blog at becomingblair.blogspot.com.

To learn more about the Healthy Charleston Challenge visit www.musc.edu/hsc or email Janis Newton at newtonj@musc.edu. The next challenge begins January 2013.