

# MOM ALLISON

**The Allison you see today – focused, driven, highly organized, hyper-rational – is a far cry from the starry-eyed 19-year-old who dropped out of school to live with a guy named Zach.**

“I thought I was so in love with my daughter’s father,” said Allison. “We had dated since I was 16. He was two years older and wanted me to move in with him. That was kind of our plan – to live together, work and save money for our own place.”

When she found out she was pregnant, Allison quit high school and went to work as a cashier in a grocery store near her home in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. She moved in with Zach and the grandmother who had raised him.

Allison thought she was living the dream.

Then, soon after she moved in, Zach became addicted to heroin.

“All the money we saved went to drugs,” she said.

“My mother was not in the picture.” Allison had grown up with her father, but she said without a mother in her life, “I didn’t know where to turn, what to do.”

She decided to talk to Melissa, a friend’s mom who was a nurse with Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Melissa introduced her to her colleague, Cheryl, who would become Allison’s lifeline.

“When I met her, she was nervous and feeling a lot of stress,” Cheryl said, “but her resilience was apparent from the day she said yes to working with a nurse.”

Allison was 23-weeks pregnant at the time and admittedly unprepared for motherhood.

“Cheryl was everything, everything I didn’t know I needed,” she said

On Aug. 23, 2014, she gave birth to Oakley, a beautiful, perfect baby girl.

Zach visited the hospital soon after she was born, and Allison said she is pretty sure that when he left, he went straight to a heroin dealer. “Things went south superfast.”

Zach went to jail for crimes related to his addiction. Then there was state prison, rehab, back to prison, more rehab ....

He died of an overdose in 2017 at the age of 25.

“Cheryl was there for me and she would have been there for Zach, too, but he was too far gone,” Allison said.

Through it all, Allison remained strong, committed to her family and intensely goal-oriented.

“I knew I needed to go back to school and graduate,” Allison said.

She had tried to get a GED, but with a job and

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WORKING FOR NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AS A NURSE, THAT WOULD REALLY BE LIVING THE DREAM.



Allison shown here with her daughter Oakley, remarks that she is a healthy, outgoing 4-year old.



Allison [shown center] had another daughter, Mckyah, [shown right] in 2017, and bought a house last November.

an infant, the demands of attending classes were overwhelming. Cheryl referred her to the ELECT (Education Leading to Education and Career Training) program, which helped her access a laptop so she could complete the requirements for a degree online.

"I found out I only needed a credit in English to graduate from my high school," Allison said. "I was able to finish in a few months instead of spending all that time sitting in a classroom."

Nailing that goal sparked a chain reaction.

"Each success led to another greater success," said Cheryl. "She became more and more confident as she continued setting goals and achieving them."

Somewhere along the way, Cheryl asked Allison if she'd ever considered a career in nursing. "I identified things in her that make a good nurse. She had empathy and the ability to understand where a person is coming from. She did not judge people. And Allison conveys a caring presence."

Allison loved the idea.

She enrolled in classes at a community college and completed the requirements to become a certified nursing assistant. She did her clinical work at a nursing home, passed her test for certification and now works full time at a nursing facility.

"She loves being a CNA," said Cheryl.

The work is challenging, Allison said. "I feel very appreciated and know I am improving the quality of my residents' lives.

"I love going to work every day."

Meanwhile, Oakley is a healthy, outgoing 4-year-old. Allison had another daughter, Mckyah, in 2017, and bought a house last November.

She is set to enroll in school in September to become a licensed practical nurse. Then she plans to continue her education to become a registered nurse and eventually go to work for NFP.

"Nurse-Family Partnership is my calling," she said. "That's my long-term goal."

This year Allison was excited to become a Parent Ambassador for Nurse-Family Partnership. In this role, Allison will serve as an advocate for NFP families and work to increase access to the program nationwide.

"I'm having so much fun with this. I like doing the advocacy work and being involved. I like the travel and meeting people, and maybe I can even get my foot in the door," she said.

"Working for Nurse-Family Partnership as a nurse," Allison said, "that would really be living the dream."



On Advocacy Day at the Pennsylvania state capitol, Allison [shown center] and nurse Cheryl [shown left] shared with a local reporter how Nurse-Family Partnership makes a difference for moms and babies.