

## Melissa



Melissa was raised in an environment filled with addiction. While growing up, she faced many heart aches and she began to experiment with drinking at a young age. Her parents were divorced. Her mother was a single parent of two young girls; she worked full time and was a student. Melissa's father was an alcoholic. After the divorce, he was not involved in Melissa's life much at all.

When she was in high school, Melissa dreamed of going to art school. But, due to her addiction and the pressure of school, she changed her mind to study English. She graduated from high school, but she didn't continue her education; Melissa said she preferred to "party."

"When I was 21 years old, I knew I had a serious alcohol problem," said Melissa. "I knew after I woke up from an eight-hour black out and could not recall a thing." She decided to get help. "I cried when the counselor told me I couldn't smoke pot during alcohol treatment, so instead I went to one group meeting in Troy and then I never went back," continued Melissa. Three weeks later, Melissa realized again that she needed help, so she went back to treatment.

At the age of 22, Melissa met her oldest son's father in a bar, and he introduced Melissa to cocaine. Their relationship was volatile and they were on again, off again. After a year, Melissa was pregnant. She immediately stopped using cocaine and quit drinking so she would have a healthy pregnancy and baby. While she was pregnant, her boyfriend began to use heroin. Soon after the birth of her son, Melissa felt very unhappy with her life and she started using heroin too. "I needed to numb my feelings," said Melissa.

In 2010 Child Protective Services (CPS) became involved and removed Melissa's son from their home. Melissa's mother gained custody and Melissa entered an inpatient detox program. But, as soon as she completed detox, she went right back to using heroin. After yet another attempt at treatment, Melissa stayed sober for six months. However, the following six months she struggled with her sobriety and relapsed again. Melissa was now living with her mom and her son and CPS referred her to a treatment program in Utica, N.Y.

After she completed the treatment program in Utica, she returned to the capital district and moved back into her parent's house. Melissa met a new man and became pregnant with her second child. After the baby was born in September 2012, Melissa and her new boyfriend shared an apartment together. Less than a year later, domestic violence became an issue and Melissa started drinking again. Once again, CPS got involved because of the domestic violence. Melissa was asked to have another evaluation for alcohol abuse. This didn't change a thing; Melissa continued to drink.

"In October 2013 I was evicted from my apartment; now I was homeless and moving between friends and family for a place to stay. Also, I was drinking a lot to cope with being homeless,"

said Melissa. “In January 2014 I ran out of places to go, so I called DSS and that’s when I was referred to Sojourn House. I was happy to be in a better environment. I started to sleep because I was more relaxed, I knew it was temporary, but I knew things were going to get better.”

After she left Sojourn House, Melissa moved into a permanent apartment with the Shelter Plus Care Program and she is doing well with her recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. Although her long-term goal is to attend SCAP’s career readiness program and work in the healthcare field, she is currently staying at home to provide care and consistency for her two young sons. She plans to pursue her employment goals as soon as her sons are stable and ready for another transition to daycare.