It’s been a long time since Chantel Miller has felt strong enough to support herself and her family.

Back in 2014, Chantel was hospitalized and diagnosed with meningitis. Six months after treatment, she landed back in the hospital with another flare-up. Her condition deteriorated after a complication during a spinal tap left her temporarily paralyzed. For the next 11 months, Chantel was incapacitated. Her mom and little sister came up from Florida to help care for her and her two children. She couldn’t make it up the stairs in her Maryland townhouse, so most days she slept on the couch in the lower level. She had to crawl to the bathroom, keeping her head low to the floor to ward off pain.

Chantel couldn’t shower, walk, eat or hold a conversation. She was sensitive to both sound and light. At times she said the pain was so severe, it felt as if she was being hit across the head with a sledgehammer. Eventually, after months of physical therapy, she learned to walk again.

A new beginning

The 29-year-old moved to Hanover this past April, seeking out more affordable housing options.

At the time, she didn’t really know anyone in the area and was struggling to make ends meet. A friend told her about a program that helped local residents become certified nursing assistants (CNAs). It was run through New Hope Ministries, a nonprofit that receives funding from the United Way of York County.

After years of working unsatisfying retail jobs and relying on friends and family for help, Chantel was ready for a change. She wanted to be able to provide for her kids on her own.

“When my mom had to go back home, I had to step up and do things I hadn’t done for a while, like be a mom and work,” Chantel says. She contacted New Hope. The nonprofit introduced Chantel to its Stability and Workforce Development program, which helps individuals and families find more long-term financial independence.

Chantel has taken advantage of the GED program and received a grant to pursue a CNA degree at Harrisburg Area Community College. New Hope has also helped her pay for things like electric bills and fees associated with getting a Pennsylvania driver’s license.

Overall, New Hope Ministries has helped keep Chantel afloat as she shores up her future. Chantel’s glad she asked for help, but she’s really looking forward to the day she can be self-sufficient. “I’m so happy with where things are at because of New Hope – they have opened so many doors for me,” she says. “I’m going to pay that forward by finishing school.”

By December, Chantel will have both her CNA and her GED. While taking classes, she’s also pursuing job leads for CNA positions at facilities in the area – she knows not only will these jobs help her become self-sufficient, but they’ll also be stepping stones to her dream career in nursing. “Eventually, I want to go for my RN,” she says. “I care about people a lot – my long-term goal is to get into pediatrics at the ICU unit at Hopkins.”

New Hope’s executive director Eric Saunders is more than happy to support Chantel as she pursues her career goals. “We think she’s a rock star,” he says. “We just want to be her cheerleaders.” And she is just one of the many individuals New Hope has helped get back on their feet and set up for success in the future.
The mission at New Hope has evolved since it was founded nearly 35 years ago. Early on, the organization was focused solely on providing food and meeting basic needs for those in poverty, whether it was access to medical care or help paying for utilities. More recently, they’ve been more focused on addressing some of the underlying causes of poverty.

“We’ve learned that people’s problems aren’t being solved by just feeding them and making sure they’re not homeless,” Eric says.

As part of the Stability and Workforce Development program, New Hope starts to tackle these causes by teaching financial literacy skills—talking to program participants about how to make a budget and how to make good choices with the money they do have. They also focus on creating services that will improve opportunities for employment through offering GED classes and job coaching and hosting job fairs.

New Hope sees education as an important component to getting out of poverty, Eric says, which is why they offer scholarships as well as training programs for those interested in becoming a nurse aide, forklift operator or obtaining a Class A CDL driver’s license.

“When you have someone who spends six weeks in a job training program like a nursing assistant, their life changes when they’re hired at $16 an hour. And it changes in a matter of weeks,” he says.

New Hope makes sure to build relationships with children who use their services – helping them in school and learning life skills.

“We recognize that poverty can be a learned behavior; it can have generational elements,” Eric says.

**Impacting the community**

New Hope’s partnership with the United Way of York County allows them to make an impact in their community.

Eric says they offer help to the individuals and families on the western edge of York County who walk through their doors.

For services they can’t provide, they’ll connect these individuals with other United Way partner agencies who offer complementary services.

“I care about Dillsburg, Dover and Hanover in York County,” he says, “*but United Way is making sure to care for everybody.*”