

Golden Shoes, Golden Hearts

AN ADOPTION DAY STORY

Denise Long's eyes sparkled—just like Keymonie's gold glittering shoes did—as they prepared for Adoption Day 2017.

Keymonie is a happy, active 2-year-old, and, as her Children's Law Center Guardian *ad litem* attorney Jess Sucherman describes her, quite the fashionista. From singing to putting on her great-aunt's makeup and "working" on a toy laptop, she's a bundle of energy. However, she wasn't always such a secure, happy child.

Rewind to two years ago when Keymonie's mom—Ms. Long's niece—was a teenager, running away from home and struggling both academically and with her personal life. Keymonie was placed in foster care as a baby.

That's when Sucherman became Keymonie's lawyer. Her goal was to make sure Keymonie had a stable, loving home as soon as possible.

Ms. Long knew bouncing from home to home and a life with strangers wasn't the childhood she wanted for Keymonie. That's when she decided to foster her grandniece herself, originally setting out to foster Keymonie for only a few months until her niece got back on her feet.

"Ms. Long's story is such a good example of family stepping in," Sucherman remembers. "She truly fell in love with Keymonie."

CLC attorneys like Sucherman work closely with our staff of investigators, social workers and education attorneys



Keymonie surrounded by family, friends, WilmerHale attorneys **Renita Khanduja** and **Nana Wilberforce** and CLC attorney **Jess Sucherman**.



Lisa Helfert/Lisa Helfert Photography

to truly understand each child and what's best for them. While the initial goal was to reunite Keymonie with her mom, it became clear that this simply wasn't a safe option for her.

That's when Ms. Long decided to adopt. After spending so much time watching their love grow, Sucherman knew Keymonie and Ms. Long belonged together, so she advocated for the adoption. Through its pro bono program, CLC secured two lawyers from WilmerHale to represent Ms. Long. Sucherman worked closely with them to ensure a successful adoption.

"Jess got the adoption started and was one of our strongest allies," Ms. Long remembers. "Even when I was working with the pro bono attorneys, she would still call to ask how I was doing and Keymonie was doing. She listened when others wouldn't—she understood."

Sucherman never lost sight of her priorities: Keymonie's safety, happiness and wellbeing.

On a cold November day, frost on the ground glistened under Keymonie's golden shoes—but nothing was as bright as Ms. Long's face. Holding hands with Keymonie, they headed into the courthouse to sign papers making official what they already knew—they are a forever family.