

WISER THAN HER 26 YEARS

KEISHA SPEAKS OUT ABOUT OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

What Keisha Hale remembers about being 12 years old is swimming for her life through murky, choppy waters in the streets around her home. It was August 2005, and New Orleans was flooded from Hurricane Katrina.

Her life would change forever.

Following the devastation, her family relocated to DC, but the adults in Keisha's life struggled to cope and couldn't take care of Keisha. So, as a teenager, Keisha entered foster care.

That's when she met Children's Law Center. At the time, Keisha struggled with depression and thoughts of self-harm. One foster parent refused to take her to the metro to go to school, so Keisha spent two hours trying to get to class on time. When she wasn't in the hospital, she was running away from foster homes—like this one—that weren't meeting her needs.

Keisha cycled through four schools and multiple foster placements in just a few years.

"When you're stuck in that environment, it's hard to see that you're more than a foster child," Keisha shared. "Every single situation reminds you of it, but you can't let your past hinder your future."

The CLC team, including attorney Emily Madden, was there to advocate for the right foster care placement and mental health supports, and to empower Keisha to pursue her education.

"I felt like my CLC attorney was a team with my social worker," Keisha remembers. "It was the best support network I could ask for."

The CLC team fought to make sure Keisha was placed in a home that supported her. They also worked to ensure she had access to the mental health services she needed.

"It wasn't just about Keisha's foster placements," Madden said. "I wanted to make sure Keisha had everything she needed as she prepared to age

out. She's always been so resilient, motivated and intelligent. I knew she could succeed."

Achieving these goals meant focusing on Keisha's hopes, dreams and education, too.

"I never talked about applying to college with my foster parent—it was my lawyer and my social worker who I made all those decisions with. I even sent my CLC lawyer my college application essays and she proofed them," Keisha remembers. "She helped me embrace my story, and to make it into my advantage."



Together, Emily and Keisha made sure her application and test prep fees were waived, debated best school options and celebrated when Keisha was accepted to college. Madden even helped her move into her dorm room.

Keisha dreams of using her experiences to help children in the abuse and neglect system. She wants other kids to know what she discovered: "You are more than a foster child, and you can follow your dreams."

Now she's in graduate school, working on everything from medical sociology to projects with nonprofits, including Children's Law Center. Keisha and a team of peers designed our 2018 Thanksgiving card for a school project.

The tenacity that pushed Keisha through those flood waters has continued to push her through the years—from fighting for her education to learning to embrace who she is and becoming a remarkable young woman.