

Wish Book video: Teen mom a lesson in perseverance

By **DAI SUGANO** | dsugano@bayareanewsgroup.com and **TROY WOLVERTON** | twolverton@bayareanewsgroup.com
PUBLISHED: December 25, 2016 at 5:00 am | UPDATED: December 26, 2016 at 3:05 am

Wish Book 2016: Young mother determined to be good role model for daughter



Bay Area News Group

SANTA CLARA COUNTY — Many people going through what Jena Knight has experienced in the past four years might have just given up.

She had a baby at 14. Her parents moved to the Philippines — and left Jena in the care of her two elder siblings — when she was 16. Then her sister — who was helping pay rent — moved out, and her brother couldn't keep up with the bills. In March, Jena went into foster care, then bounced from a temporary facility to a foster home to a group home.

Through it all, Jena persevered. Despite having a child and working, she graduated from high school early and earned a pair of college scholarships. Now, she's tackling “this rough

spot in my life” by focusing on being a role model for her daughter, whom she calls “a big ball of sunshine.”

With help from Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, which paired her with an advocate and mentor, she's found some stability.

But life isn't easy. She wakes before dawn to get Elissa ready and start a two-hour commute to the day care Elissa loves. Then she's off to work nearby for the day before reversing the commute, usually arriving home after dark.

She plans to start college in January, and her advocate, Susan Maciel-Finley, feels sure Jena will find a way to make that work, too.

“She'll be a success story,” Maciel-Finley said. “She doesn't know it yet, but her journey is going in a positive direction. ... I will be so proud of her, in knowing her, considering the hardships that she's had, and seeing her turn around.”

Watch Jena Knight and Susan Maciel-Finley tell her story in a feature video at wishbook.mercurynews.com

How to Help

Donations will help buy Jena Knight a reliable car so she can spend less time commuting, and it will be easier to go to college and spend time with her daughter. Donations also will help Child Advocates of Silicon Valley recruit advocates for other foster children like Jena.
