

Cheh Speaks For First Time About Personal Experience With Housing Insecurity

Friendship Place's Benjamin E. Cooper Awards Displays Altruism At Its Finest

Washington, DC, Oct. 07, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Friendship Place](#) hosted its 22nd Annual Benjamin E. Cooper Awards Ceremony on Tuesday recognizing Ward 3 Councilmember Mary Cheh as well as four other honorees for their outstanding contributions to the cause of ending homelessness. Cheh received the "Community Leadership" award and gave a heartfelt speech, speaking for the first time about her personal experience with housing insecurity.

"I'm finally at an age now where I can confess that from around the age of 14 or 15, I was a couch surfer," Cheh said. The Councilmember admitted she didn't have a stable home for nearly four years of her life. "I was rescued by a college scholarship and a dorm room," she recalled, jokingly emphasizing, "I loved that dorm room!"

Cheh became the first person in her family to graduate from high school and college.

"We thank Mary Cheh for generously sharing her story," says Friendship Place President & CEO Jean-Michel Giraud. Her journey to the council has been truly remarkable.

Cheh's commitment to the work to end homelessness and housing insecurity is notable. Since becoming a council member in 2006, she has done tremendous work to secure resources for people experiencing homelessness. She introduced, and in 2014, the DC Council passed the LGBTQ Homeless Youth Reform Amendment Act, which increased the number of shelter beds dedicated to LGBTQ youth. This year, Cheh reintroduced the Eviction Record Sealing Authority Amendment Act of 2019, which mandates that all eviction records be sealed after three years. She is also taking a courageous stand in favor of the new Ward 3 shelter, which will provide families experiencing homelessness with a safe place to sleep as they transition into permanent housing.

"Going through housing insecurity can be an experience that's lonely, scary, seeming hopeless and sometimes difficult to share," says Giraud. "Many don't know that some of their friends and colleagues have faced this experience. I, too, have had some of these challenges." As a young immigrant in the US, the President & CEO lived in hotel rooms in San Francisco's gritty Tenderloin neighborhood during the seventies. He hopes that Cheh's testimony on Tuesday will be an inspiration for people who are struggling today. "There is life after homelessness and housing instability, and many people in the community are fighting to help you rebuild."

Friendship Place's mission is to end homelessness and rebuild lives. Last year, through the support of the community, the organization led the way in ending and preventing homelessness in the DC region by securing housing for 1,640 people, including 572 children and 355 veterans.

"Congratulations to Councilmember Cheh and all of our Benjamin E. Cooper honorees," said Giraud. The evening's honorees also included former board member Anne Morrison, IT professional Ansar Khan, and Friendship Place volunteer Charlie Betts—who is known as the IKEA furniture assembler for formerly homeless/newly housed families in DC. "We value each and every one of our advocates, volunteers, public officials, and all who are with us," Giraud says, adding, "We all have to be in this fight in order to win it."

The Benjamin E. Cooper Awards honors the life of a high school student and devoted Friendship Place volunteer. Ben died in a tragic car accident in 1997.

You can support Friendship Place's mission to end homelessness and rebuild lives by [volunteering](#), [donating](#) or [attending one of the organization's events](#). On Saturday morning, November 9, join Friendship Place on the National Mall for a walk to fight homelessness, [Friendship Walks](#). For more information, visit friendshipwalks.org.

###

About Friendship Place

Friendship Place is a leader in Washington, DC, in developing solutions to homelessness that have demonstrable results and a lasting impact.

Yimka Odebode
Friendship Place
2025032964
yodebode@friendshipplace.org