

YI-CHIN CHEN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN-BOSTON

“Good evening. My name is Yi-Chin Chen, thank you all so much for being here tonight.

I could use my time on this stage to tell you how the challenges in our country impacted our Achievers. Like how our Achievers have to walk by fully masked federal agents in military garbs on their way to school; or how our families had to visit 3 or 4 different food pantries a week in order to not go without ; or despite the historic high graduation rate in Boston public schools, 80% of black and brown students are still not reading on grade level.

There is no amount of time enough to tell you all of the things that make it inherently difficult for our Achievers to get ahead. So instead, I'll tell you about the people you met this evening.

Like little Mydas who greeted you at the door and how he told a joke about a cookie going to the hospital at our talent show (it felt crummy);



And Paula, who sold you a golden ticket and how she spent an entire weekend delivering 30 pairs of snow boots to our Eastie Achievers so they could go to school after a big snow storm.



And Franny, our caregiver engagement specialist, helped more than 30 families avoid evictions.



And our mentors Stefan and Isaac who started a cooking club with four of their boys making delicious meals for all of us.



In moments of peril, these things are protections against hopelessness. In the last 365 days, our team spent **27,986 hours creating a safe barrier against all of the uncertainties in the world.** When our Achievers are with us, they don't have to choose between survival and hope.

And because of that, **our program graduates are 30% more likely to pursue post secondary education compared to their peers; 99% of our program graduates are working or in college; and 86% of our Achievers report feeling hopeful for their future even when the odds are stacked up against them.** So many of you have helped make it possible this year. From the bottom of my heart - Thank you.

All of the volatility of the world keeps us up at night, but our Achievers' future is what we wake up for each day. Tonight, I stand before you with a challenge: more than 240 kindergarteners are waiting for a spot in our 12.5-year mentoring program. The support we raise tonight means we can say yes to more children whose hopes and dreams deserve to be protected regardless of how many storms they must weather. I know you care deeply - otherwise you wouldn't be here. So I hope you choose to give generously.

[WATCH THE "RISE WITH US" VIDEO HERE](#)