

2018 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner



◆ Muslim Girls Making Change ◆

SuAnne Big Crow Memorial Award



In today's climate, wearing a hijab attracts attention, and students are often confronted with racism, discrimination, and micro-aggression in school. Instead of shrinking away or responding to hostility with hostility, four girls from Burlington High School in Vermont formed the slam poetry quartet Muslim Girls Making Change (MGMC). They proudly wear the hijab and use slam poetry as their medium to convey a message to other students of color,

or with different religious beliefs, that they deserve to be treated as any student in high school should be treated - with respect.

Describing one of their performances, Emily Bernard, a Professor in the English Department and Critical Race Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Vermont said, "Hawa [Adam], Lena [Ginawi], Balkisa [Omar] and Kiran [Waqar] came up to the stage, laughing and chatting with the audience, appearing very much like a typical group of affable teenage girls. Then, the lights dimmed, the girls joined hands, breathed together, and began. I don't think I will ever be the same. They performed poems—carefully choreographed about what it means to be a Muslim in America; what it feels like to move around with brown skin in a white place; and the complexities of being Hijabi in a country where frank expressions of sexuality and autonomy in women's lives are often conflated."

Their message combatting bigotry and prejudice transcends their Muslim religion and demonstrates to young and old that we must open our eyes and hearts to change this world for the better.

"They are role models in our community," said Rebecca EunMi Haslam, K-12 Equity and Inclusion Instructional Leader, Burlington School District and 2015 Vermont State Teacher of the Year. In the greater Burlington area of Vermont, students represent over thirty countries, bring forth over fifty cultures, and are part of a school system with mostly white classmates and teachers. MGMC's work has helped give voice to the experiences of students of color and students from marginalized groups of all kinds, proving that anyone's voice has worth, value, and strength.

MGMC leads by example and performs for students of all ages. It is their creative and articulate advocacy for accepting diversity that boosts the self-esteem of other students who may be struggling to find their place in society. Their contributions to the Champlain College Symposium on Women's Empowerment, the Youth Build School, Spectrum Family and Youth Services and UVM's Black Student Union are just some of the groups and organizations they have influenced building the self-esteem of other youth of color.