

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner



◆ Mike Harman ◆

Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award



Mike Harman has dedicated his career and his life to improving opportunities for and understanding the plight of homeless people. He has worked to build bridges between the homeless and elected officials, faith organizations and community groups to improve the lives of families in poverty and the understanding of their plight.

Harman has served as the Homeless Education Liaison for the Salt Lake School District for over a decade and works directly with an increasing population of homeless youth and families in the region. To illustrate how Harman connects to educators and helps

them find ways to support students, Heidi Matthews, Utah Education Association President, shared this story: "When Mike got the call about a homeless boy who was continually getting in trouble at school, he went to visit the boy's exasperated teacher. The boy brought toys to school on an almost daily basis, which was against the rules. Mike explained to the teacher that the shelter in which the boy lived didn't allow for items to be left during the day. If the boy were to leave his few belongings, they would certainly disappear. Getting in trouble at school was by far preferable. With this knowledge, the teacher then sought a compromise that would keep the toys safe and the classroom manageable. Everyone benefitted because Mike had the knowledge, compassion and the opportunity to educate."

"We have seen Mike at all hours of the day and night delivering bus passes, gas vouchers, food, clothing, bed, furniture etcetera to families in need. Beyond ensuring that the material needs of a child's family are met, Mike ensures... issues of poverty, addictions, mental and physical health cannot be used as an excuse or obstacle to a child's ability to attend school and obtain a quality education," said J. Michael Claret a Community Organizer with Crossroads Urban Center.

From his work to amend the Legislative Platform at the 2016 NEA Representative Assembly to call on HUD to broaden their definition of Homelessness to align with the Department of Education definition, to testimonies before the Utah State Board of Education, the Utah Education Association Board and Council of Local Presidents, the Utah State Legislature, the Salt Lake City Council and the Salt Lake School District Board of Education, Harman has been a tireless advocate for the cause.

Harman is also the Founder and Director of SOAR - Summer Outdoor Activities and Recreation through the Neighborhood Housing Association of Utah. This program engages middle school students, many of whom are marginalized by poverty, in a nine-week youth leadership development program. There are daily opportunities for community service, asset-building and recreation. The group also takes three excursions throughout the summer to locations such as Washington, D.C., Yellowstone National Park, or other state or national recreation sites. The program is offered for a nominal fee, based on the families' ability to pay, and can be as low at \$10 for the entire summer.

Uncomfortable in the spotlight, Mike does not often share acknowledgements of his work or awards received, but many have recognized the incredible contributions that he has made for homeless youth and families. Mike Harman is a champion, an incredible Association leader and a dear friend to many.