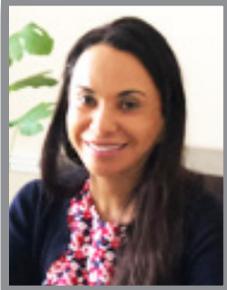


# Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

## ◆ Leila Kubesch ◆

### Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award



Leila Kubesch's grandmother sat her down at a young age and told her to dream big. Growing up in North Africa in poverty, Ms. Kubesch never owned or played with a toy, didn't have a book to call her own, and wondered what it would be like to learn English or Japanese. Her grandmother's wisdom poured into her at an early age leading Ms. Kubesch to the US where she has been an educator for 20 years and speaks several languages, including an African dialect, French, and Spanish.

The courage to dream big is part of Ms. Kubesch's educational philosophy and activism.

A seasoned child advocate, she began raising awareness of the plight of emancipated children who had aged-out of the foster care system becoming homeless. Her tireless activism on behalf of foster children gave her the opportunity to share her ideas on large platforms including TedXCincinnati where she tells the story of growing up in Tunisia and the life lessons she learned from her grandmother.

Leila Kubesch's activism has changed Ohio's laws around foster care. Ms. Kubesch's past, growing up in North Africa, gave her a passion to work with economically disadvantaged students, and a unique perspective on the importance and impact a quality education can have in changing a young person's life. Through her efforts working with politicians and writing for national publications, Ohio House Bill 50 was signed into law, giving foster children the opportunity to have a home until the age of 21.

As part of her advocacy work, Ms. Kubesch founded a non-profit called Parents2Parents. In her teaching career, Leila discovered that often times non-English speaking Africans were mistaken for African-Americans who performed linguistically lower than their peers and incorrectly placed in special needs programs rather than much needed ELL classes. Parents2Partners was founded to better educate families on their rights and make them more knowledgeable about community resources in order to remove educational barriers for their children. Through Parents2Partners, Leila piloted a week-long mentoring program to teach life skills to emancipated homeless foster care youth. During this, she gained a firsthand account of what foster care youth needed to move forward and the barriers they faced, such as how lacking government-issued identification prevented them from gaining employment. Joining Mayor Cranley's task force on immigration, she fought for the city to extend an ID program to include the homeless to afford them opportunities for employment and was successful.

Recognizing the trauma in her student's silence and solitude, Ms. Kubesch began to look for therapeutic remedies she could apply and share with her students. Many of her students have lost guardians to overdoses or incarceration resulting from drug addictions, and many struggle emotionally from challenges in their home life and are chronically absent. Her extensive research in alternative remedies for trauma therapy led her to Kripalu Yoga. She trained in Trauma-Sensitive Yoga, collaborated with school administrators and community members to convert a vacant classroom into an in-house yoga studio, and wrote a grant to fully equip the studio with mats, blocks, and props. Participants learn to rise above challenges, develop resilience, establish inner calm, and expand awareness for personal growth, success, and healing.

As a young girl Ms. Kubesch learned how to dream big and today she pours this important life lesson into every student she encounters.