NEA honors educator Leila Kubesch with human and civil rights award

Kubesch is among a dozen recipients of the prestigious NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards

HOUSTON—As an educator, Leila Kubesch has accomplished many feats, including founding a non-profit organization, advocating for children in the foster care system, and finding creative ways to work with students experiencing trauma. In recognition of her many accomplishments, Kubesch earned the Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award.

“Leila Kubesch has influenced the lives of many young people, and we are proud to honor her today,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “The efforts she has made to assist vulnerable children and families are both creative and impactful. Learning Leila’s story allows each of us to feel inspired and motivated to persevere through tough times, and to give back whenever we can.”

Kubesch’s activism is informed by her own personal history. Born in Tunisia into poverty, without access to toys or books, Kubesch is passionate about helping economically disadvantaged students. She understands the importance and impact a quality education can have on a young person’s life.

Her dedication to society’s neediest children has led her to raise awareness of emancipated teens who age out of the foster care system and into homelessness. By advocating Ohio politicians and writing for national publications, she helped pass a state law that offers foster children a home until age 21. Kubesch also fought for a program in Cincinnati that provides government-issued identification to homeless youth so that they can apply for jobs.

Kubesch also founded a non-profit organization called Parents2Parents, which educates families on their rights and connects them to community resources. Its initiative include a mentorship program designed to teach life skills to emancipated and homeless foster care youth.

As a middle-school teacher, Kubesch recognizes that some of her students have experienced trauma in their homes and communities that affect their ability to learn and thrive. These challenges have prompted her to turn to therapeutic remedies such as Kripalu yoga. After collaborating with her school and community members, she converted a classroom into a yoga studio.

Informed by her personal history and empowered by her passion to help young people, Kubesch represents how purposeful and principled action can create many improvements in communities.

Leila Kubesch was one out of 12 outstanding social justice heroes honored at NEA’s 2019 NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards, which took place on July 3, in Houston, Texas. Click on link to view video tribute of Kubesch.

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