

FAQ

1. More About Your Coach: Zahra Lightway



You will be trained by a certified school principal and teacher who left the system to found her own school, ran a youth program for three years in her own home, and has a Master's Degree in Education Zahra Lightway M.Ed.

Why I Started Coaching Home Educators

My life teaching in a traditional school

Back in 2004 I felt highly frustrated as a teacher in a traditional public school in Houston, Texas. I had taught early childhood, middle and high school by then and it was pretty much the same story everywhere. We were being given training and tools to teach in child-centered ways that valued their individual gifts and talents, and yet being constrained by an overloaded system so packed with requirements it was near impossible to action much of it, if any.

Traditional school oppresses and fails our children

The result was that children were not nurtured and I watched as they failed to achieve their highest potential. Instead they lost touch with themselves, with their strengths and talents and left schooling with some vague idea of being "an A student" or "good at math". Few felt empowered to create an amazing life living their dreams. Most felt obligated to go to college and study something they thought they might be good at.

But there was more. So many youth were losing their confidence, becoming anxious, depressed and almost suicidal - a feeling of unease that I couldn't quite shake had come over me. Something just felt wrong here. Very wrong.

So I left the system and began a four year journey of self-discovery, unlearning and relearning. I decided I wanted to start a school answering the question: "What if there were no constraints and we could have a program using all the best educational practices?" What might that look like?"

DeToxing The Trained Teacher, Parent, and Child in Me

I attended the Alternative Education Resource Organization Conference in upstate New York, and the International Democratic Education Conference in Vancouver, BC. I met young people who had been unschooled, democratically schooled, free-schooled and variations on those themes and noticed there was something different about them. They interacted with adults as equals, giving and receiving total respect. They were super confident and empowered. They knew what they liked to do. They could learn anything alone or knew where to go to get help if

needed. They seemed far in advance of their peers in traditional schooling with many of them enrolled in college courses as early as 15 or working in apprenticeships or starting their own businesses. I finally put my finger on the difference: these kids knew who they were and were living life deliberately. It was a revelation and I knew I wanted to provide that for other children with one difference. I wanted to infuse the Light Way program with an essence of spirituality I found lacking in many of the others.

To do that I had to work on myself to re-examine my beliefs, training and programs. I had to let go of everything that didn't match these new understandings of how children learn best. I read books. I attended and organized conferences. I ran a Saturday program for youth 7 - 17 and then a summer camp and finally opened Light Way School in The Woodlands, Texas on September 1st, 2009. What a feeling of joy and purpose for all.

However, the joy didn't last long. After the economic downturn starting in 2008, it was not the best time to start a private school. Parents were struggling just to pay the bills. In fact, I realized the private school model would never provide access for all families. We finished the year and I closed the school down wondering how I could contribute to making the dream of an educational process that empowers children come true.

2. Some Disturbing Statistics or Sorry, How Many Kids are suicidal?

Seven thousand (7,000) students a day drop out of American high schools. That is one every 26 seconds. 1 in 5 students is chronically absent. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, suicide is now the number two leading cause of death in youth aged 15 - 24 and rates are still rising. These are shocking statistics. Why is this happening?

In part it may be because our young people are facing a different world and probably a far more challenging future than we did. As a result many feel not understood, hopeless, over anxious and stressed to the max. While the first part is true for pretty much every generation, the difference now is that these levels of stress and anxiety have never been seen before, partly because never before have young people had to face a world that over stimulates their nervous systems every minute of the day with pings, notifications, and endless feeds of bad news about the possible absolute breakdown of our ecosystems and possible end of our planet's ability to support life as we know it. And instead of being able to act, they are told to sit behind a desk and learn facts most of which feel irrelevant and uninteresting.

A Whole New Vision For Learning

So how can we support our young people to get them from feeling totally lost to feeling empowered? The current, worldwide large scale prescription of anti-depressant, anti-anxiety medication to children as young as 6 is not an acceptable solution!*

What we need is a whole new vision for education. Traditional curriculum approaches have become irrelevant, boring, and restrictive - leaving students feeling disconnected from their real life and the real world around them. They feel completely disempowered.

Skyla: A Case Study

Take Skyla, who at 15, read about life in the oceans being extinct by 2040, and was then told to turn the page to the next chapter. She was left gasping in fear wondering how no one else, least of all the teacher, seemed bothered about this as they all dutifully did turn to the next page.

She went home and asked her father about the total disconnect between these kinds of realities and life inside the four walls of the classroom. He tried to answer her, but her family did not know how to offer her another educational option. So she forced herself to go to school every day to a school system that did not listen to her and only cared about her academic performance.

The results? Now in her 20's, like so many other young people who were oppressed by a system that doesn't listen to them let alone empower them to take action and feel confident, she suffers from severe anxiety . Simple acts in our modern world like flying on a plane necessitate her taking strong medication to knock herself out, the effects of which last for days after. Her case is somewhat extreme, but not atypical. Many youth are experiencing panic attacks, insomnia and extreme anxiety on a regular basis.

*<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/teen-depression/in-depth/antidepressants/art-20047502>

3.What Is The Light Way System?

The Light Way System incorporates all the best practices in education and learning and makes them accessible to parents so they can become top notch learning facilitators for their children. The core of the system is firmly grounded in 21st century learning with the difference that as a parent, you will be able to use all these ideas, concepts and tools without the restrictions of an outdated school system unlike teachers in public schools who must follow strict testing schedules and outdated curricula.

The Light Way System produces children and youth who are wise, heart-centred, passion-driven, empowered, self-directed learners inspired to innovate in the real world regardless of their age and with the confidence to do so.



Video Transcript:

21st Century Learning is creating a buzz around the world So what is it exactly? Some people think it means using technology and it does, but that's only a small piece of the puzzle. 21st Century Learning is...

Self-directed - no more telling learners exactly what to learn, when and how... instead allow them to drive the curriculum guided by their own inner potential.

Integrated - don't segregate knowledge into subject areas recognize the interconnectedness of all knowledge.

Empowering - "power over" learners is out "power with" learners is in.

Innovative - pre-determined outcomes are gone instead embrace open-ended, innovation with unexpected outcomes.

Relevant and Real Life - let go of traditional 18th/19th century curriculum content and allow content driven by relevance to students' real lives and the real world around them.

Passion-driven - shifting from learning focused on passing a test, or preparing for next year... to learning based on our passions.

Heart-centered - move away from a mind-based approach open up instead to a heart-centered, compassionate, spiritual educational experience.

Wisdom-based - replace learning from only a teacher with learning from elders, mentors, and artisans, apprenticeships, experiences & master classes.

Place Free/Location Independent - leave classroom-based instruction in our homes or other designated learning spaces... go to learning happening anywhere and everywhere.

Age-Free - don't base curriculum choices on a child's date of birth free them to develop at their natural pace in all areas.

21st Century Learning as used in the Light Way System is empowering, passionate, wise, innovative, real life, heart-centered learning and... ..it's not the wave of the future. It's now. Catch the wave.

4. Case Study: Patty's Story Part II

"In traditional school over the last four years, Arianna and Matthew would have spent 200+ hours taking standardized tests, another 300 hours preparing for them, and 3,600 hours sitting behind a desk being talked to about all the things they have instead been living."



More about Patty. She began her journey with Arianna and Matthew in 2014. In 2017 when I talked to her she was talking about them going back to school because their needs had changed. Here is her latest update:

"I never sent the kids to school, just found classes that peaked their interests. Currently, Matthew (technically a 10th grader) took his first college class at the community college and loved it! He was also in a play at the college. He thinks he wants to pursue a degree in Psychology so he is taking 2 more college classes in the spring.

Arianna is working on a goat rescue farm and loving every minute. She wants to go into sustainable farming. She's hoping to take a horticulture course at the college (if they let her in early) next year. She also puts a lot of time into her harp lessons. She's getting quite good.

Both joined a group called Teen Learning Lab, which is a homeschool group for high schoolers with courses in social justice and communication with human understanding and inclusiveness. It's been an amazing find this year. Their favorite is a pre-law/mock trial class.

They are both still working on the tree farm, and have a great relationship with their 65 year boss.

I'm good. Still running my business, teaching art classes for homeschooled high schoolers, and I'm busy filling in gaps of education for the kids and driving them everywhere! Paul is good, too. The kids still talk about you, and how you changed our life!"

I have to admit I was in tears when I read this! What an incredible success story. Those kids are 15 and 14, employed, taking college courses, working in their passions and learning skills that will serve them for life. In traditional school over the last four years they would have spent 200 hours taking standardized tests, another 300 hours preparing for them, and 3,600 hours sitting behind a desk being talked to about all the things Matthew and Arianna have actually been living.

I know which of those two scenarios I would want for my kids. (My son is 32 now.) The best part is that Arianna and Matthew created their own curriculum. When Patty trusted them to know what they needed to do and learn about they got back in touch with their true selves and their true passions blossomed. All Patty had to do was show up and facilitate.

[Case Study: Patty's Story The "Final" Results - 2020 Update](#)