

Information About The HALI Project

The HALI Project was formed in November 1999 as a way to formalize the work of Brad & Karen Thompson in serving the special needs community. Named for our daughter, who faces the challenges of multiple diagnoses, the work of The Project has steadily expanded in size and scope since that humble beginning.

We started with three schools in the Eastern Panhandle Special Education Cooperative - Clarendon, Canadian, and Wellington. Our first curriculum (“Empowered Parents”) aimed at helping parents navigate the education system and building positive relationships with their local school systems. It also emphasized maintaining a healthy balance between the challenges of raising a child with special needs and the needs of other family members and parents themselves.

As the program grew and matured, we began to get questions from our families about transition and adulthood for people with special needs. We are tackling that challenge with this thought in mind, “If inclusion is good for everyone in our schools, wouldn’t it benefit everyone at the community level?” We believe the answer to that is “YES!” With some revisions and additions to our “Empowered Parents” curriculum, we created “Community Voices.”

The goal of “Community Voices” is to continue to develop the idea of inclusion that has been so beneficial to **all** students beyond our schools and into our communities. Just as our schools are better places when students with special needs are appropriately included, so will our communities. The key to making that happen is education – of families, schools, medical professionals, business leaders, and community leaders. Our experiences have taught us that there are people with hearts and vision for what we are trying to do in every walk of life. They just need to understand the challenge facing us and the piece of the solution that they can provide.

The goal of our training is not to add another notebook to a shelf. It is to identify members of the community who want to make a difference in their communities for people with special needs. At the conclusion of our training, we will establish local Community Voices teams made up of people from every walk of life, including self-advocates. We will then work with that group to help it form a mission statement and begin working to make its community more inclusive. The next step of the process would be to have the existing group identify future participants to experience the training and join the ongoing group in its work on community issues.

In closing, we want to make sure that you understand one thing about our work and heart. We do not believe in an adversarial approach in any setting. We believe far more good will be done through listening and partnering with those who share our vision than will ever be accomplished through litigation or even legislation. Change that impacts people’s lives happens at the community level, when we get to know each well enough to share a common vision.

We hope to have the opportunity to share that vision with you.

HALI Project Program Objectives

Each of our programs is designed to accomplish a specific set of goals. I have listed the major goals of each program below.

1. **Empowered Parents** – This group meets every other Wednesday night at 7 p.m. at the Southwest Church of Christ (45th & Cornell in Amarillo). We have a group of trained adult volunteers to take care of your children while you participate in the group.

- a. Give parents a place to share their stories as well as hear the stories of people trying to serve them.
- b. Give participants an understanding of the grief process, the chronic nature of it, and how it impacts families of children with special needs. Our goal here is to help parents understand the importance of accepting the child as he/she is.
- c. Teach participants the importance of dreaming again, appropriately for their child with special challenges. As providers, we teach the importance of encouraging the dream process for parents.
- d. Teach participants healthy assertiveness.
- e. Give participants a basic understanding of key components of IDEA and ADA.
- f. Teach participants the importance of balancing responsibilities.
- g. Teach participants the importance of team building.

2. **Community Voices** – we provide this two-day training for the community in the fall of each year.

- a. Build family awareness of the number of agencies who want to help them through the challenges they face.
- b. Help community agencies understand the challenges that our families face, both in the home and in the community.
- c. Develop awareness for participants of the challenges that face people with special needs as they begin the transition from the education system to adulthood.
- d. Build relationships in the community for the purpose of creating community teams that work toward community inclusion for people with special needs.

3. **Community Voices – Next Steps** – this training is offered to people who have completed the original CV training. The purpose is to take the theories we have learned and apply them to specific activities that would benefit the special needs community in our area.

- a. Create the ongoing “Community Voices” and develop local leadership.
- b. Help participants recognize personal strengths in order to organize around them.
- c. Persistently asking the question, “Who’s missing that needs to be here?”
- d. Provide ongoing technical support for the group.
- e. Set up “Empowered Parent” and “Community Voices” training, inviting participants from a list generated by the local “Community Voices” team with the

intention of adding them to the team. The ultimate result will be a powerful advocacy group made up of people from all sections of the community.

4. Zaccheus' Place – This is a bible class program for adults with special needs that is hosted by The HALI Project at the Southwest Church of Christ. We currently have about 30 members from almost as many churches. This opportunity gives our adults a place to interact with their peers in a safe environment, as well as give them an opportunity to learn more about God.

Director/Trainer – Brad Thompson

Brad has a Master's Degree in Counseling from West Texas A&M University and is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Brad has worked with families for 20 years, with a major focus on families with children with special needs and the challenges they face since 1999. Since September 13, 1989, Brad has had the experience of raising a child with special needs (Hali) along with her big brother Justin. None of this would even be possible without the love, support, vision, and commitment of Brad's wife and co-worker Karen.