

Empowering girls with Girtlivity



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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According to UNESCO statistics, women make up only 23% of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) talent globally, and this inequality is often felt in South Africa's science, technology and engineering industries.

Geared to tackle this daunting problem head-on is an Umhlanga based mom, Romona Mahadeo, and her daughter Kiara, an ambitious kidpreneur. Together they have built the Girtlivity brand – to inspire and empower girls aged 3-12 through a monthly subscription 'STEAMED UP' box.

'STEAMED UP' stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics, Entrepreneurship, Design, Understanding and Practice.

The Girtlivity Box is thoughtfully designed by educational experts to encourage creativity, curiosity and support literacy development. Each box includes an activity book highlighting a female role model and her unique story, with 10 to 15 hands-on activities. Also included is a creative play prop, a featured character trait that helped her succeed and 2 to 3 practical tips for parents to easily nurture that trait, experiments, games, collectables plus and more.



We chat to Romona Mahadeo to find out more about Girtlivity's journey...

Can you tell us a bit about Girtlivity?

The Girtlivity Brand is designed to empower girls to grow more fearlessly themselves. It's a girl empowerment brand that celebrates the fact that girls can be anything they want to be.

Our mission is to create quality time for families without the prep work and introduce girls to positive female role models, thereby empowering them to be curiously creative in a fun and educational way.

We then came up with the idea of The Girtlivity Box, which is a unique monthly subscription to remind girls about how amazing they are. The aim is to inspire girls between the ages of 3 and 12, by celebrating female role models who helped make the world better. Each Girtlivity Box is thoughtfully designed by educational experts to encourage creativity, curiosity and support literacy development in the most fun ways.

The Girtlivity Box includes a 24-page Girtlivity Activity Book showcasing her unique story, with 10 to 15 hands-on 'STEAMED UP' activities. Also included is a creative play prop, a featured character trait that helped her succeed, practical tips for parents to easily nurture that trait, experiments, games, collectables plus so much more.

■ *When, how and why did you get started?*

Girtlivity got started about two years ago (2018). The visionary at Girtlivity is Kiara, my 7-year-old daughter. She loves unboxing videos. She makes surprise boxes for family and friends. She believes opening up a fun-filled box can make anyone happy.

When Kiara was five she was curious about who the first South African female in space was. I told her there has been no South African female that has been to space. She excitedly replied, "We have to tell all the girls that they can do it. They can be the first in space." The more I researched female role models, women in STEM constantly popped up. I reviewed statistics about women and I was disappointed. I was determined to teach my daughters more about STEAM while celebrating women who made the world better.

Girls have been changing the world for pretty much forever; history has seldom ever given girls the credit for some of the most incredible achievements made.

■ *What is the core function of Girtlivity?*

Girtlivity is about teaching South African girls between the ages of 3 and 12 about important women in history who excelled in STEM fields, with the hope that we will encourage them to pursue opportunities in STEM-related fields.

We want children to have fun and be happy today and we are passionate about allowing them to develop into curious and critical thinking people tomorrow. Developing confident, fearless and unique superheroes.

■ *What are some of the obstacles you have had to overcome since starting out?*

Fear was a big one for me. Helping a 7-year-old child to start a business was scary. At first, I was scared to be judged. I questioned if South Africa was even ready for a girl brand inspiring girls to be empowered. The more I worked on building the brand, the more inspired I was by the female role models and their stories that Girtlivity was highlighting. I was passionate to tell the world. Girtlivity was here and ready to change the leadership landscape of South Africa and globally

for all girls.

There was definitely a lack of knowledge on the importance of STEM education for girls. By exposing girls to STEM and giving them opportunities to explore STEM-related concepts, they will develop a passion for it and hopefully pursue a job in a STEM field.

Funding a startup was challenging. As a family, we had to cut out luxuries to fund this passion project that led to the brand you see today. This brand was too important. It is life-changing.

Another problem we faced on our end was realising just after launching, our subscription boxes had too much plastic items included in the box. Therefore, we stopped production to change that and came up with a more eco-friendly packaging option.



■ What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?

Ariana Huffington has the perfect advice I think that I can really relate to and that is that you have to truly believe in your product to deal with the naysayers and persevere on. It's very hard for others to believe in you if you do not believe in yourself or in my case a seven-year-old child.

■ What has been your proudest achievement thus far?

Personally, it was making a 7-year-old child's dream come true. To see Kiara gleam with joy and become speechless as the characters from her imagination came to life. It was the most amazing feeling that made jumping over every obstacle worthwhile. Getting the nod of approval from Kiara was huge as it confirmed we really did it!

A few hours of going live, we actually started selling our awesome boxes and I was just so proud of what we achieved. The positive feedback from everyone was overwhelming. I had this oh so real moment when a group of mums at my daughters' school approached me to congratulate me on our startup and we were literally in tears and in awe of the impact that this brand can positively have on our children. I could just see the confident 20 something-year-olds that the little girls in our arms will one day become. I was blown away.

▣ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

Taking small steps that lead to great things. Giving little girls a voice to be confident about their ideas and dreams, will give rise to female-driven startups. Investing in youth and developing a platform to showcase their entrepreneurship talents. This will create jobs and build our economy in a way that has never been done before. I feel so honoured to be in the forefront and contributing to the change of the entrepreneurship culture in South Africa.

▣ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African start-up landscape?***

Equal opportunity for all people to fund their start-ups. Funding platforms need to be easily accessible in conjunction with education and training. Investing in female-owned startups need to be a priority. Youth development programmes equipping youth to build on their weaknesses and explore their strengths. We need organisations and workshops where we share our experience and promote each other. Giving start-ups a platform for people in South Africa to get to know them and to support them.

▣ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?***

Listening, believing and never giving up. I know it sounds so cliché but very true. Then making the necessary changes that align with your brand, to give your consumer the best experience and hopefully change their lives. Success to me is a brand that changes lives.

▣ ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

I truly believe every person has a million rand idea, it just takes a little hard work and belief to nurture and develop something spectacular. If you never try, how will you know?

▣ ***Where would you like to see Girtivity in the next 5 years?***

We are currently busy at Girtivity on expansion programmes that are life-changing. We also want to explore other ideas our visionary Kiara has, whether it is in fashion, literature, beauty, science or technology. She is always busy doing something. Girtivity is here and ready to build a brand that supports and encourages girls to be their best self. Girl + Creativity + Positivity = Girtivity

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