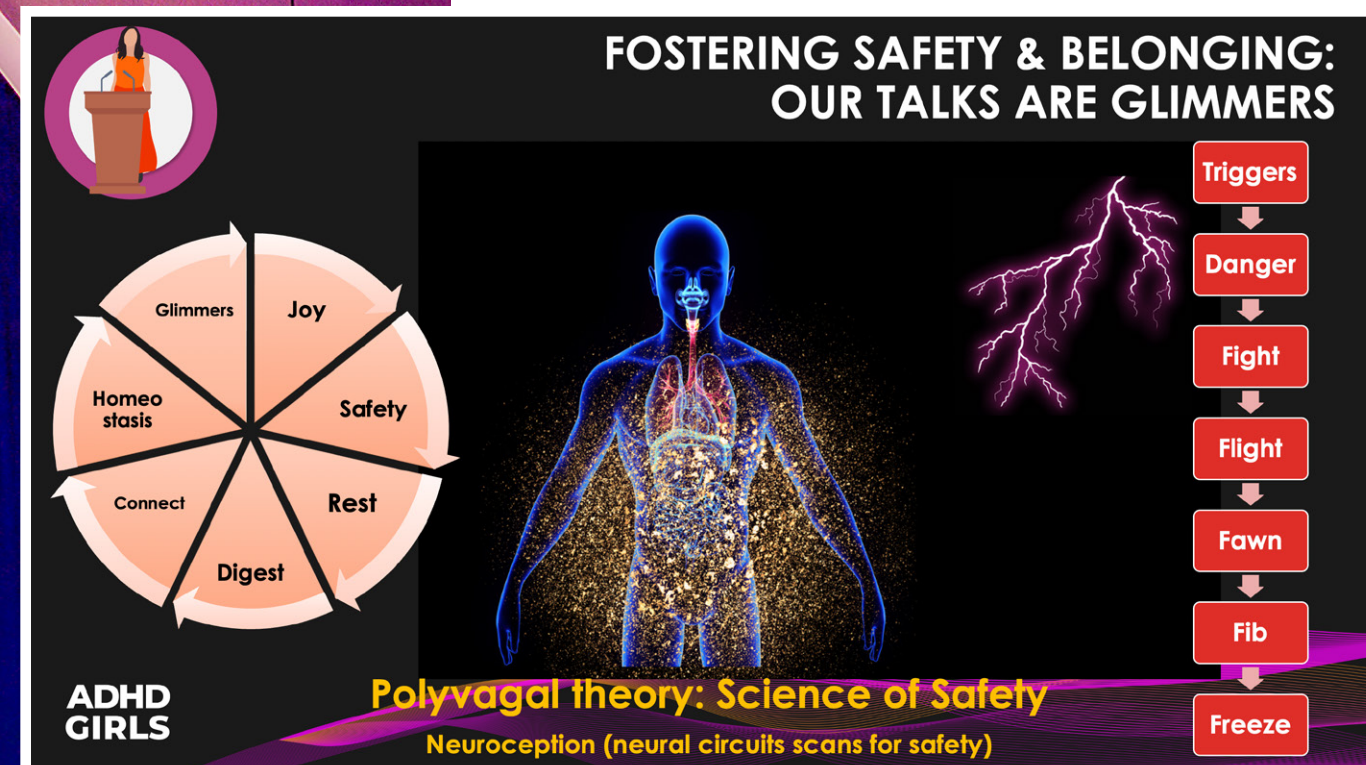


ADHD Girls

Helping the world thrive in the face of neurodivergence

- With a significant rise in testing and diagnoses of ADHD and autism, particularly in women and girls, the neurodiversity movement is here, and it's here to stay.
- A social impact company based in London, UK, ADHD Girls creates and shares tools with the aim of making ADHD more manageable and easier to navigate in a range of settings.
- ADHD Girls blends online and in-person learning dedicated to neurodiversity, ADHD, and autism.
- Founder Dr Samantha Hiew explains the genesis, mission, and future of the organisation.



Samantha Hiew has made it her mission to create and share the necessary tools to make the world more aware and responsive to neurodivergence.

the world more aware and responsive to neurodivergence. Hiew is a multi-award-winning social entrepreneur, keynote speaker, consultant, and scientist who offers both online and in-person services.

Could you please tell us a bit about ADHD Girls and its mission?

ADHD Girls is a social impact company with a dual mission to empower women and girls with ADHD to thrive in society and to improve neurodiversity understanding through an intersectional lens. Powered by personal lived experiences of ADHD, we embody the neurodiversity movement which displaces the medical model of disability and recognises the barriers presented through the way society organises itself. We believe that these barriers can be removed with adequate support.

The work I do serves as a bridge between two worlds: those who have lived experience of neurodivergence, and those who do not, as we work towards integration in society.

But ADHD Girls isn't merely a business. I am driven to create a legacy and an embodiment of empowerment and wellbeing, to increase the quality of life for neurodivergent women

and those of intersecting identities. My immediate goal is to enable neurodivergents to feel psychologically safe in the workplace, and to ensure that they can access equitable opportunities through educating and training leaders and managers.

I believe part of what makes my work impactful is that I'm learning and healing alongside the community. As someone who lives on the cusp of two cultures, that is, South-East Asian and English, as well as being neurodiverse and neurotypical, means that I'm able to use my unique perspective to explore the nuances in our neurodiverse experiences, which unearth the diversity within diversity itself.

You hold a doctorate in medical science from UCL and have an acclaimed background in cancer virology and childhood leukaemia studies. How has this inspired your current role as the founder of ADHD Girls?

I founded ADHD Girls following a decade of existential crisis after my PhD in cancer research. As an individual motivated to make a difference, I was deeply frustrated by the time it takes for scientific research to translate into clinical practice. My postgraduate study was met with challenges while I flew

Over the last two decades, the recognition and diagnoses of neurodivergence, particularly ADHD and autism in women and girls, has increased dramatically. You could say that we're in the age of the neurodiversity movement, and it's here to stay.

Research Features was privileged to catch up with Dr Samantha Hiew, the founder of ADHD Girls, UK. Through a combination of her own lived experience and research, Hiew has made it her mission to create and share the necessary tools to make

What helps my message stick is my ability to 'think like a scientist, but speak like a human.'



under the radar with ADHD and autism, so I was disillusioned about my future in the laboratory. At the age of 30 and fresh out of academia, I asked myself: 'Removing what I was conditioned by my culture to pursue, what did I want to be when I grew up?' I guess I was following an internal compass.

Therein began my career exploration across 16 industries which coincided with motherhood, when I felt deeply lost along the way. Fast forward ten years to the present day, I realised the skills I honed during this time were what I needed to create ADHD Girls, a social impact company in which I could channel my curiosity as a scientist to dig deeper into the truths of our neurodiverse experiences, along with my affinity for communication and creative expression – which I channel on stage to reach hearts and minds, to move forward for social change.

It is the first time in my career that I felt a true sense of belonging. My training as a scientist taught me to observe and question the status quo, gather information, create new hypotheses, test them, and communicate my new knowledge with everyone. I might have left the lab, but my work follows the same process. What helps my message stick is my ability to 'think like a scientist, but speak like a human.'

What motivated you to focus on ADHD in girls and women, and how is their experience of ADHD unique?

I was looking to understand my own ADHD before I got diagnosed and, naturally, I took a deep dive into the literature on ADHD in

Neurodiversity & People Manager:
A Manual for Transformational Leadership

Samantha Hiew, PhD
(Founder of ADHD Girls)

women and girls. The experience left me feeling disempowered and misrepresented. So, I did my own research by way of interviews with other women with ADHD via my [Conversations with women with ADHD](#) campaign. This led me to understand that, despite being united by a label, we are nevertheless all different. The thing about stigma is not that it's strictly untrue, but that it's incomplete. So, I went in pursuit of the truths about what happened to us (neurodivergent with ADHD) and found that both nature and nurture impact the way we manifest our ADHD.

There's a female ADHD iceberg which I've drawn, and am in the process of publishing. Many women ask for it so they can put to good use; underneath the surface signs of inattention, people-pleasing, anxiety, and depression, people pleasing is much more, including the roles we've each assumed, and the different ways hyperactivity is manifested as hypersocial, hypertalkative, hyperreactive, hypersensitive, for example. So many of our challenges come from fulfilling the gender role in society and the impact of hormones during hormonal transitions in our lives that

ADHD Owner's Manual
Finding Your Authentic Place
in the World of Work

Samantha Hiew, PhD (Director at ADHD Girls)

healthcare professionals need to know about. The future of ADHD treatment for women needs to encompass a holistic perspective, integrating mainstream and alternative coping strategies that the neurodiverse community finds useful.

How important are tools and resources in understanding neurodiversity, for example the women with ADHD workshop and accompanying workbook you have recently been working on?

It's 'lifesaving' important. When we read and hear about ADHD experiences summarised in literatures and perpetuated in clinical practices, many internalise the negative messaging, leading to self-stigma and learned helplessness. This is by no means me discounting the challenges we face, we have plenty. But I also believe that no one knows us better than ourselves, and we need to be able to believe we're a sum of both the good and the bad to be able to move forward and improve our quality of life.

I believe the tools and resources help answer the question: 'Now that I know I

have ADHD, what's next?' I can't stress how important these resources are because, like me, so many women with ADHD fall off a cliff after a late diagnosis; many are given medication and advice on CBT and psychotherapy, but not much else. Much of what I include in my [ADHD & women: tools to thrive](#) workshop and workbook is what I've learned alongside the community, understanding the science of the brain and how dopamine works, navigating my own journey with medication – which came with lots of ups and downs – and the many other areas you should reflect on to truly thrive with ADHD.

The ADHD community has responded well to my workbook, saying it is 'refreshingly non-judgemental and kind. We love it'. I have also created another [ADHD owner's manual](#) workbook and am in the process of developing a 'Neurodiversity & People Manager handbook', alongside many other projects in the hope of slowly enacting the social changes that myself, and the wider community, want to see.

You recently set up Utopia to support those with ADHD in navigating their daily lives. Could you tell us a bit more about this?

'Utopia' is both a campaign and a platform. First, the campaign tells the hidden stories of our neurodiverse experiences in different communities and life circumstances. This campaign aims to facilitate the sharing of stories in order to paint a more accurate picture of our neurodiverse experiences, drawing on lived experience of the life we've had and the consequence of it on how our neurodivergence manifests.

Second to this, I launched 'Utopia' the platform, which supports individuals with ADHD and those with children with ADHD in navigating their lives through education and

What are some of the main challenges in recognising ADHD, and how can those with lived experience offer support to others around them?

One of the main challenges of recognising ADHD is due to us living in a dopamine-seeking society. In addition to this, the representation of ADHD in the media is still very biased towards a one-dimensional experience of the 'naughty white boy' growing up with 'challenging' behaviour patterns. As we grow up to become adults, hyperactivity and behavioural challenges can become even more internalised.

We know that there are [six fundamental features of ADHD](#): hyperactivity, impulsivity, inattention (also including hyperfocus), excessive mind wandering, behavioural

The future of ADHD treatment for women needs to encompass a holistic perspective, integrating mainstream and coping strategies that the neurodiverse community find useful.

community. The platform now hosts online learning, and we have plans to transform it into a space for neurodivergents to find advice on the holistic management of ADHD. This is a big undertaking, and will require further careful consideration from all of the team about how best to achieve this.

self-regulation challenges, and emotional dysregulation. These features help characterise a more accurate picture of adult ADHD.

I think that lived experience advocates, when represented by diverse identities, have a lot to teach us about how ADHD may



As we grow up to become adults, hyperactivity and behavioural challenges can become even more internalised.

present itself in different communities, as well as life circumstances. It's a matter of the source of your education and who you trust, that will inform you about what you believe ADHD to be. The [Staring Back at Me](#) campaign shares the stories of women from different backgrounds, and this is something that I love.

How can the UK become more aware of neurodivergence in schools, the workplace, and beyond, and how can events like your recent talk on Neurodiversity & Leadership encourage this?

My recent talk on Neurodiversity and Leadership is my latest advocacy 'campaign' to gently remind the public that the rise in ADHD – with a 3,200% increase in women taking online tests – and autism – with a 787% increase in the last two decades – diagnoses points to one

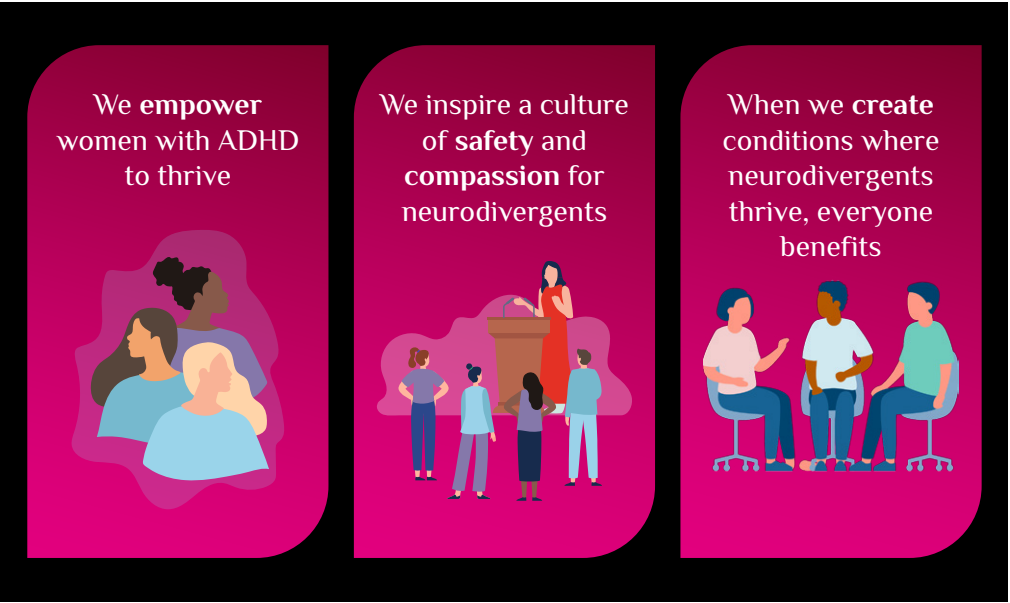
thing: that the neurodiversity movement is here to stay.

As leaders in education and workplaces, we have the choice to do something about this – to create environments that suit different learning, thinking, processing styles, and behaviours. Without reassessing these areas to account for neurodivergence, we risk destabilising workplace settings with the unprecedented demand for diagnosis, which inevitably cycles people back through their environment with an increased need to ask for support.

We aren't just dealing with neurodivergence, we are dealing with a community who constantly scans their environment for belonging and safety. My talks and programme are about increasing that sense of safety in our environments;

only by training more people to become 'neurodiversity champions' can a company or school become fully inclusive. In other words, while we can reasonably adjust a neurodivergent to their environment, until an environment is fully inclusive, it is hard for a neurodivergent to truly thrive. We are making huge impact via our neurodiversity sessions, where 99% of our neurodivergent audience felt seen, validated, and connected, and 92% have moved to champion intersectional neurodivergents.

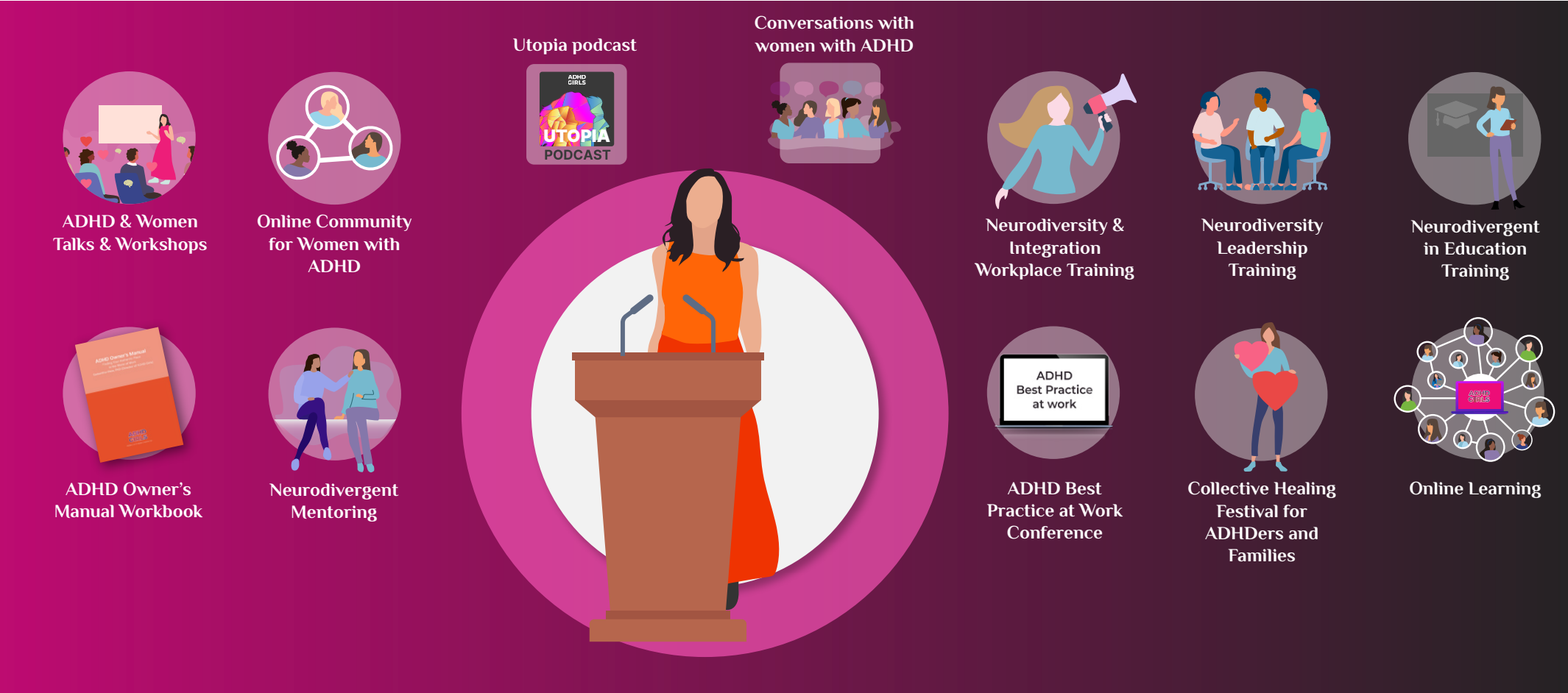
The reason, I have come to observe, is because my talks function as 'glimmers', that is to say, the opposite of a 'trigger' – an experience which fosters a sense of safety and acceptance, through a concept known as neuroception, where we scan our environment to know how to feel about something, or someone. It is through



intersectionality. More information about the findings can be found [here](#).

The most important insight I drew from the conference is that neurodivergents want to be understood, and do not want to be singled out as different. We spent a long time trying to fit in, and even though we do need some reasonable adjustments to perform at our best in our jobs, more than anything we want to be welcomed and feel like we belong in our workplaces.

More than anything, ADHDers have an increased need to feel alive, and this has implications on our careers. We either stay in one job for 20 years or pivot every two years due to a host of factors like boredom and burnout. Part of my job also includes training organisations and workplace settings on neurodiversity, covering a [range of important topics](#) to ensure ADHDers are in the right hands to thrive!



sharing stories that we learn about who we are and about the world around us; stories connect and build bridges, help us heal from our past and kickstart our growth.

By creating a safe space for neurodivergents to share and compare their experiences – also providing them with the tools necessary to improve their

I also explored the current theme in the world of work, 'Purpose', in my latest LinkedIn newsletter article. This is especially important as we live in an 'identity economy', or what's known as 'The Great Reflection'. As neurodivergents with ADHD, we're motivated by an interest-based nervous system, one which needs interest,

The rise in ADHD and autism diagnoses over the last two decades points to one thing: that the neurodiversity movement is here to stay.

lives – we have changed mindsets to give neurodivergents a renewed perspective of themselves and their community. On the other hand, it has also sparked positive conversations and actions around neurodiversity at work, providing people with the tools to request adaptations and make changes to their own processes to get the best out of their career. In addition to this, I have also produced a [short video](#) outlining the key objectives of the Neurodiversity and Leadership programme.

challenge, novelty, urgency, and passion to thrive. You can find more in my [workbook](#) aimed at helping ADHDers find their place in the world of work.

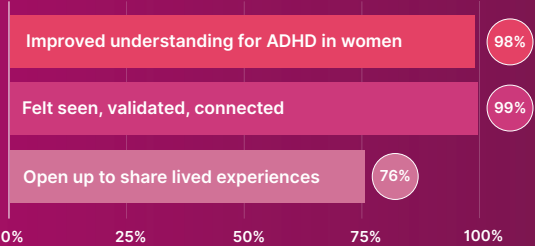


ADHD GIRLS

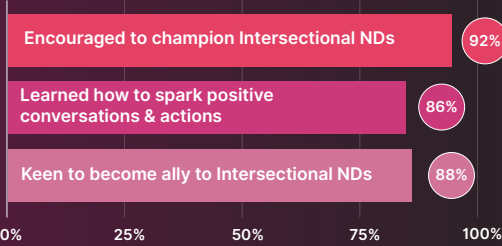
Samantha Hiew

e: samantha@adhdgirls.co.uk
w: adhdgirls.co.uk
w: samanthahiew.com
in www.linkedin.com/in/samanthahiew
yt youtube.com/c/adhdgirls
ig instagram.com/adhd_girls

ADHD & Women Talk



Neurodiversity & Integration Keynote



In 2022, ADHD Girls held the first ADHD Best Practice at Work Conference. What were the findings of this, and do you intend to host more of these events?

The ADHD Best Practice at Work conference was created to bring the world of work together with neurodivergents with ADHD, so we can come up with neuroinclusive solutions to tackle barriers around recruitment, retention, fostering a sense of belonging, and better understanding