

Girls can do anything

While learning about the first man to go to space, seven-year-old Kiara Mahadeo had one question – who was the first woman to go to space? When she discovered no South African women had done a space mission, she decided to start the change . . .

Kiara has always been a maker – taking one thing apart to make something new. A habit, her mother Romona says, she didn't always encourage! "I sometimes got frustrated with Kiara always taking everything apart. One afternoon, I decided to try understand what her thinking was. When I sat down and really took time to listen to her and understand her inventions, I realised that she was onto something," says Romona, who lives in Umhlanga with her family.

"She was creating board games and toys and had come up with GT (GirITivity) – a character who could achieve anything and who, together with her ginger Kitty, was empowering girls to be fearless."

Kiara explained to her mom that they needed to let all the girls know that they could be the first South African women in space one day, which got Romona thinking about the shortage of women in scientific fields. "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," says Romona, who works in the finance industry.

Motivated to change this statistic, Romona and her daughter have built the Girtivity brand to inspire and empower girls aged three to 12 through a monthly subscription 'STEAMED UP' box which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics, Entrepreneurship, Design, Understanding and Practice. The box has been designed to encourage creativity and curiosity and support literacy development by going on educational adventures with GT and Kitty.

"Each month focuses on a different theme and each box includes a 20-page activity book highlighting a female role model and her unique story,



Kiara with her mom Romona

with 10 to 15 hands-on 'STEAMED UP' activities. Also included is a creative play prop, a featured character trait that helped her succeed and two to three practical tips for parents to easily nurture that trait."

Now, family play time is a top priority in the Mahadeo household and Romona says spending time playing with the children and creating conversations around games has changed their lives.

"It's difficult for parents to take time out of their busy lives to actively engage with their children, but it is so crucial and really fosters the family bond. We think we know our kids, but life is hectic and fast-paced and before you know it, they are grown up and you've missed the opportunity to really experience them growing up. We



decided to make time for family night and boardgames and it was a decision that has changed our lives."

Details: Monthly subscription is R350 for 12 months, www.girtivity.co.za.