

## OUR MISSION

We aim to benefit autistic and neurodiverse (ND) girls and women and those around them, including families and professionals, due to a lack of understanding, support and provision available. Currently we support autistic girls and women (diagnosed or not) in Surrey and beyond, and hope to expand to other ND conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).



## WHY WE'RE HERE

More than 1 in 100 people are believed to be autistic, and 3 or 4 in 100 to have ADHD. Neurodivergent brains are not broken; we just process the world differently to most people. Life can be challenging when our environment is geared towards those who are not ND. But with self-knowledge, a positive peer group and the right support, we can thrive as well as anyone.

Unfortunately, this is not always possible for girls and women. Many go undiagnosed or unsupported because we do not fit the male-based stereotypes of autism and ND conditions. We spend their formative years facing communication, social and sensory challenges, 'masking' our differences to fit in and struggling to meet neurotypical expectations at home, school and work. This mismatch between reality and expectation is incredibly stressful; many girls feel worse and worse about themselves, become isolated and can develop serious mental health problems.

This doesn't have to happen. Recognising the lack of awareness, peer group opportunities and support available for autistic and ND females, Appeer was set up to connect them with each other and provide opportunities to learn, grow and enjoy ourselves. Using a positive peer approach, we seek to empower autistic and ND girls and women to forge their path to a happy, healthy and authentic future, accepting and celebrating who we are.



## WHAT WE DO

### CONNECT GIRLS & WOMEN

To nurture authentic peer groups and friendships, we run activity-based sessions for girls and teens in their areas of interest, including animals, gaming, baking, photography, yoga and more. We are also piloting a social support group for autistic women navigating early adulthood.

### SUPPORT PARENTS AND CARERS

Supporting parents and carers with autistic daughters is key to our mission. We facilitate peer support parent/carer groups alongside the girls' sessions when in-person. Whilst online, we hold talks by qualified professionals such as psychologists and occupational therapists on relevant issues such as Sensory Sensitivities, Family Relationships, Anxiety and Suicide Prevention, as well as sessions for parents/carers to share experiences and support.

### ENRICH UNDERSTANDING

The importance of a lived-experience approach to understanding and support is increasingly recognised. We empower autistic and ND girls and women to help create resources using their own voice for service-providers, families, professionals and their peers. This work will include an online library, videos, podcasts and creative work.



*"This is my sort of girls' club." 8-year-old Appeer Group Girl*

## NEURODIVERSE FEMALES

*The ratio of males to females diagnosed as autistic is historically 4:1, but now believed to be closer to 2:1. Around 75% of girls with ADHD often go undiagnosed, and when they are it's at least 5 years later than boys.*

*Autistic and ND girls are often 'good as gold' as young schoolgirls, under incredible self-pressure not to 'mess up'. At home they let it all out.*

*70% of autistic people have a mental health condition. They are known to be more vulnerable to negative life experiences, so early and appropriate support is so crucial.*

*The challenges of puberty are exacerbated by feminine clothing and hygiene products for girls with sensory sensitivities.*



## HOW PEER SUPPORT HELPS

*She said in the car on the way home 'Mummy, there are other people who feel like I do, I thought I was the only one.' I have to say I felt the same when I left today." Mum after in-person group*

*I can't believe X is on the Minecraft call! First time she has spoken online ever! I will now book every session - She was too anxious before but as u can see she is chatting!! Mum re online session*

*Such a bonus at the girls' sessions to have adults around who understand and are non-judgmental. I really valued the chance to talk... Mum of 10yo girl*

## ABOUT APPEER

Appeer was started by and is run by parents of autistic girls and neurodiverse women to provide a peer group and fill a gap in support in Surrey and beyond. We espouse a positive peer approach, aiming to empower and inspire, not coerce or 'cure'. The directors and staff have wide experience in the field. Registered as a Community Interest Company in 2019.

## AT A GLANCE

- All our work is underpinned by 6 key strands supporting life skills and social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing.
- During lockdown 2020-21 we ran 75 online activity sessions for up to 8 girls per session, as well as 25 expert talks and discussion groups for parents/carers.
- Almost 250 parents/carers of autistic and neurodiverse girls are registered with Appeer.
- We offer teen yoga and hobby-based sessions to learn new skills and make friends, thanks to Central Surrey Voluntary Action.
- Ratings for all our events are over 90% 'Very Good'.
- We have a bank of experienced parent/carer volunteers.
- Appeer is proudly lived-experience led, and we source neurodiverse input and talent at every opportunity.



## THE NEED AND OUR PLANS

Appeer began as a voluntary effort, and the demand for our support led to a short-term Lottery grant to fund staff so we could expand to support our community during Covid.

Demand is increasing all the time. Local Authorities and schools now referring girls and women to our support, and we are developing business plans to respond. As we build our sustainability we seek project or core grant funding to help us continue offering a lifeline to neurodiverse girls and women.

We are also open to creative partnership opportunities; the lives of our girls intersect in so many ways with education, health, leisure, the world of work and civil engagement.

**Let us know if you can help us help ND girls and women.**

## OUR SUPPORTERS AND LINKS

We are grateful for the kind support of the **government's Coronavirus Response Fund** distributed by the **National Lottery Community Fund**; **Central Surrey Voluntary Action**; **Woking Councillors**, the **National Autistic Society**. We also have the support of Family Voice Surrey, Surrey Youth Focus and other sector support organisations. We work closely with local health, educational, wellbeing and arts professionals.



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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