

NAVIGATING BIG EMOTIONS AND HIDDEN HURDLES IN NEURODIVERSITY:

ADHD, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia.

A SPELD NZ Webinar - Hosted by: Former SPELD Student-
Katie Fisher, BCST, PGCertCreatPrac, Author, Illustrator
and Artist.



WHERE IT STARTED:

I've spent a long time learning to understand myself and even longer learning to embrace everything that comes with being Neurodivergent.



WHERE IT STARTED:



- At 11, my SPED Teacher Diane changed everything she met me where I was, not where the system expected me to be.
- High school: I could hold a room in conversation but couldn't get a structured paragraph onto paper. Girls like me got missed.
- My Art teacher, I'll never forget that kindness.
"It only takes one person to believe in you"



THINGS STARTED TO 'CLICK'



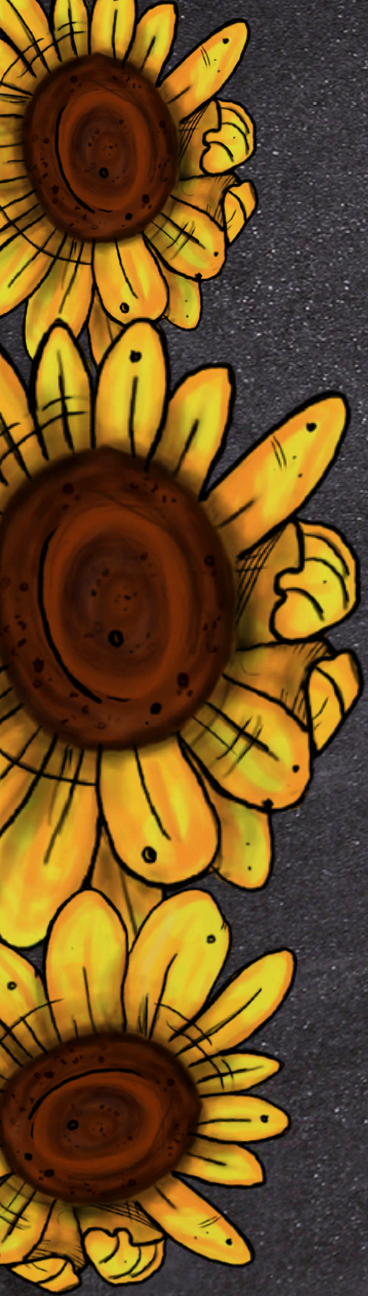
- Uni Mentorship
- Advertising: I was great with people, terrible with numbers.
- Personal training: loved a physical job & helping people!
- After struggling with my mental health for most of my life - In my 30s, a psychiatrist said: ADHD - slowly my whole life made sense.



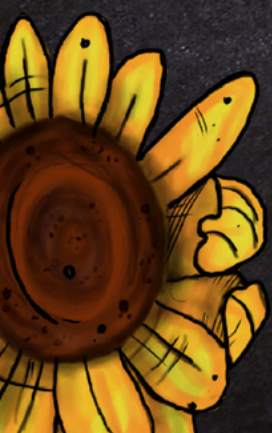
COMING FULL CIRCLE - THE BOOK



- Postgraduate study in 2024 coming full circle, back to my love of story telling!
- Freya the Fairy doesn't quite fit in at fairy school where the rules feel impossible and the world feels overwhelming. Freya is essentially me, based off of my experiences navigating neurodivergence.
- Collaborated with a psychologist to use techniques to help children navigate emotions.



ACT 2 — THE TRIPLE THREAT UNPACKED



ADHD: THE EMOTIONAL ENGINE

- ADHD isn't really a focus problem. For me, it's an emotional experience
- Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)
- Masking



DYSGRAPHIA THE EXHAUSTION OF EXPRESSION



- Dysgraphia is the disconnect between my brain and my hand AND even brain and language!! -The Verbal Gap
- Fine motor avoidance
- Full-body writing



DYSCALCULIA: BEYOND THE NUMBERS.



- Dyscalculia is NOT just “ Math Dyslexia” eg its not only just numbers flipping/ not being able to understand math/ numbers.
- Time/ Space / Distance / Directions
- Body awareness / depth perception
- Messy rooms



THE PERFECT STORM: ALL THREE COLLIDE

When all three combine, you get task paralysis — and from the outside, it looks exactly like not trying.

Dyscalculia panics about how long things will take.

Dysgraphia dreads putting anything on paper, and decoding emotions or thoughts into ideas and then into steps.

ADHD is overwhelmed before a single decision gets made.

The result: frozen. Drowning in shame. Wanting desperately to start.





ACT 3 —

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS?





MAKE IT VISUAL! (OR CONCRETE)



- Visual Timers: Seeing time "disappear" helps with Dyscalculia/ADHD.
 - Colour Coding: Assign colour blocks to diary eg in Google calendar you can choose different colours for events.
 - Drawing emotions before naming them: once I could picture a feeling, I could start to put language to it
 - Visual schedules, picture-based communication, mind maps before written plans eg Mind mapping!
 - Money can be easier to understand with physical objects
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TECH IS YOUR TEAMMATE



- Speech-to-text changed everything for me — ideas out before my hand can slow them down (Otter AI)
 - AI for editing, grammar, spelling — I got marked down for these my whole school life, not because I didn't try, but because the rules genuinely wouldn't stick, and as an adult i still have issues with this - in my postgrad study i got a special exemption to be allowed to use AI for editing, you could use : Chat GPT, Gemini, Claude and “grammarly”
 - Budgeting and scheduling apps. The iPhone measuring tool so I don't have to hold numbers in my head.
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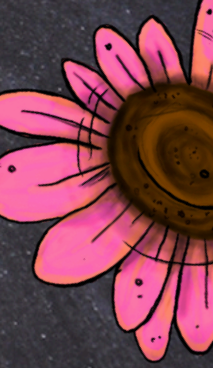
ASKING FOR WHAT YOU NEED!

- Learning to name it clearly!!
- Exercise “Self Compassion”
- Most people are genuinely happy to help once they understand it's a bridge, not a barrier
- For parents: the earlier a child learns to name what they need, the better equipped they'll be as adults

Be clear with institutions such as universities about what works for you.



MOVING THROUGH BIG EMOTIONS

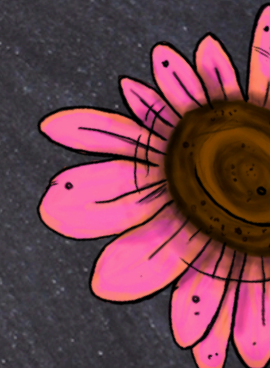


- Potato Days - they are inevitable! learn to ‘ Rest’ without guilt.
- Movement: running, walking, dancing, bouncing on a mini trampoline between tasks. Move it out of your mind and into your body. Physical brain breaks for children — not screen time, movement!!
- Noise and sensory management. Noise-cancelling headphones in overwhelming environments can be transformative. Sensory comfort isn't fussiness.
- Protect the flow state. Unstructured play is vital. Let them stay in their flow for longer. Give warnings before transitions sudden 'we're leaving in five minutes' can feel like a crisis. “ Padding time ”





TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN



“Being neurodivergent is why I see the world in the vivid, whimsical way that I do. My challenges and my creativity aren't separate things — they're the same thing.

SPELD gave me a world I could exist in. And that brought me back to stories. When that's fostered rather than corrected, I believe neurodivergent children can tap into something genuinely remarkable.”





SPELD NZ OFFERINGS

As well as offering assessment and tuition, SPELD NZ has many webinars/courses to help you understand and support neurodiversity. (For families and educators.)

In particular for families, there are short SPELD NZ online Kōwae Ako/Learning Capsules you can watch in your own time, such as:

- Navigating Neurodiversity in Early Childhood
- Navigating Neurodiversity at Primary School
- Navigating Neurodiversity at Secondary School
- Top Ten Resources to Help Your child at Home

For the month of July only, there's a 50% discount on all Kōwae Ako/Learning Capsules.

SPELD NZ also runs a two-day course: Introduction to Specific Learning Disabilities . Face to face throughout New Zealand and sometimes via Zoom. All are welcome.

Also check out the Stories page on SPELD NZ's website for **encouragement and inspiration**.

To find out more about SPELD NZ learning, go to www.speld.org.nz and head to the Training page or email nationaloffice@speld.org.nz





QUESTION TIME

Thank you so much for being here tonight!

You can find the book and how to contact me below:

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