

Clothes for sitting posture to change fashion for wheelchair users

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Sophie Neff in the School's MA Studio

Wheelchair users fed up with clothes designed for able-bodied people could soon benefit from a knitwear range which centres on a sitting posture.

Nottingham Trent University Masters student Sophie Neff created her own brand, Inclusive Knits, to address what she sees as gap in the market, particularly for men.

The 25-year-old – who's studying MA Fashion Knitwear Design at the University's School of Art & Design – created a range which is more practical and comfortable for people who have to sit for the majority of the day, but which are just as wearable when standing.

"Through my research with wheelchair users it was very clear that, like anyone else, they want [clothes](#) which are fashionable and practical to wear," said Sophie, originally from Germany.

"But many are dissatisfied with the existing market and don't feel that it really meets their needs. What people want is clothing which is designed with able-bodied and wheelchair users in mind.

"For instance, your [posture](#) completely changes if you are sitting down. The back of the trousers get longer and your shoulders move forward. It's also difficult to put a jumper on when you are in a sitting position. And the pattern of your garments completely changes.

"So I've developed a range which works around these problems, but which is just as appealing for able-bodied people who have to sit a lot, perhaps at a desk during the day."

Sophie used kinetic garment construction cutting techniques to create trousers which had no seams or pockets on the backside in order to create a more comfortable experience for the consumer.

Most of the clothes are made from New Zealand merino wool, organic cotton and elastic lambswool, which are natural, thermo-regulating fibres that provide a soft tactile quality and add comfort.

Her designs also include:

- trousers constructed for standing and sitting positions by the use of folds and darts in the fabric
- pockets on thighs, rather than at the hip, so they can be easily accessed
- zips in the hem of trousers legs near the ankles so they can be put on and removed easily, particularly while wearing shoes

- zips integrated in the seams of jumpers that are easy to grab and slide
- wider fitting arm and shoulder areas to allow for more movement
- tighter, elasticated cuffs to avoid sleeves snagging on a wheelchair.

Wheelchair user and Nottingham-based music producer Rob Maddison was one of a number of people to help Sophie in her research.

He said: "It was wonderful to meet a designer like Sophie who creates clothes that are easy to wear for wheelchair users but still look totally amazing."

Sophie's designs are on show for Nottingham Trent University's postgraduate art and design exhibition Mastered.

The exhibition – at the University's Bonington building in Shakespeare Street, Nottingham city centre – is open until Wednesday 27 July and features works from diverse disciplines including film practice, photography, puppetry and digital animation, graphic design and more.

Sean Prince, principal lecturer MA Fashion, Textiles and Knitwear Design at Nottingham Trent University, said: "Sophie has taken her personal appreciation for the issues wheelchair users face and used it to rethink how today's clothes are designed.

"Many people who do not use a wheelchair sit down for the majority of the day, but existing clothing designs do little to address this common aspect of modern life.

"By developing an inclusive knitwear range, Sophie has pioneered a new product which is just as relevant for able-bodied [people](#) as it is [wheelchair users](#)."

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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