

The Tanni&Anni clothing range may be aimed at disabled people, but it replicates high street style and price, says **Annie Makoff**

Where would you expect to find a new, up-and-coming clothing range, exclusively designed for disabled followers of fashion? In London? Manchester? Or how about Milan? Actually, Tanni&Anni is neatly tucked away in Leek, Staffordshire. It is an Aladdin's cave of specialised clothing. Clothing, which, according to fashion designer and director, Annabel McMahon, replicates high street brands while being tailored for disabled people.

Take the elegant trench coat for wheelchair-users: it could just as easily have been a familiar brand for the average consumer. But, as Annabel explains, 'the difference is in the detail'. The coat is made up in sections, which enable a wheelchair-user to slip into it without needing to tuck the bottom underneath them. It simply attaches neatly at the back, and once fastened

Tailor made for the great outdoors



Designs for life: Annabel McMahon (left) and Dame Tanni

looks like any other trendy garment.

But Annabel insists that her range is not solely for wheelchair-users: "We have customers who have autism, we have customers who have learning disabilities." She says: "They all use different products to the wheelchair-users so it's a broad range of solutions that we offer."

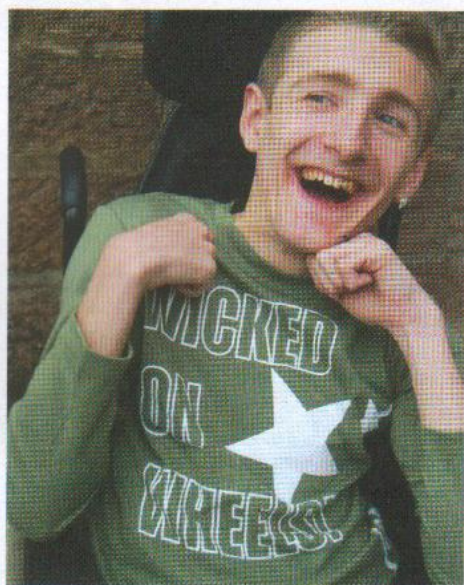
And even the prices for such a specialised collection are comparable with the likes of Gap, Next or Marks & Spencer.

The range materialised from the success of Rackety's, the adaptive clothing range for children. When demand for an adult range grew, retired Paralympic athlete and Rackety's co-director, Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, and Annabel McMahon put their heads together and came up with Tanni&Anni at Rackety's.

Annabel, who previously worked for a knitted-garment manufacturing company and for a company designing an array of glitzy dressing-up costumes for children, had no initial experience in adaptive clothing. Never one to be put off, she approached the challenge with

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an open mind. "I had no preconceived ideas about what you shouldn't do. I had no history of OTs telling me it's got to be like this or got to be like that," she says. Annabel's motivation was choice and variation: she wanted to create clothes that gave back the



choice factor to the disabled customer.

Yet despite a society steeped in consumer culture, there appeared to be a lack of adaptable clothing for the average disabled person. Annabel was determined to address what she saw as a gap in the market.

This first collection is predominantly an outdoor range for a variety of occasions with a "sporty" theme. The sports jackets, available in navy or cream, are ideal for colder temperatures, and come in two half sections, attaching with Velcro at the back. There are stylish leg-warmers for the wheelchair-user, as well as hugely-successful popper vests which come in a variety of colours. More designs and more exciting concepts are on the way, and maybe even more cheeky slogans for the label's Get The Message t-shirts, which carry slogans



such as, "Wicked on wheels" or "Don't stare, I know I'm cool!"

Dame Tanni believes the t-shirt collection to be "gently confrontational". She told The Stirrer, a Birmingham website, that the range "is a good way of changing people's perception of disability". She said: "There hasn't been anything like this until now that allows disabled people to dress in the way they want. It's very exciting." And exciting it is, for even those who model the clothes

challenge public perceptions. They are shown in their element: they are active, confident and they show the clothes at their very best.

"The clothes don't always look styled as they might in other modelling situations," Annabel says, "but we wanted to reflect them as accurately as possible, worn by people getting on with their lives." And clothes that reflect this kind of optimism are surely worth shouting about. ■

→ More information

Check out the Tanni&Anni range:
Online: www.tanniandanni.com
Telephone: 01538 381430
Write to: **Rackety's Ltd, Unit 16,
Town Yard Industrial Park, Leek,
Staffordshire ST13 8BF**



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