Carol shakes up fashion industry with inclusive designs at first ever adaptive clothing runway

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Award-winning Gold Coast lawyer, artist, designer and disability advocate, and co-owner and lead designer of Christina Stephens adaptive fashion label, Carol Taylor knows first-hand the power of fashion to change a person's life.

"I might be on wheels, but fashion moves me forward. That moment I started to wear colour and find, create and make clothing to feel like the person I was pre-injury, it was cathartic. It changed me – and put me on the road to good mental health. That's how powerful clothing is."

For Carol, who is quadriplegic following a car accident, accessible and beautiful clothing is not just a personal necessity, but a passion that has led her to a flourishing new career.

Supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which provides Carol with support workers at home and work, Carol is on a mission to shake up the Australian and global fashion industries to become more inclusive.

"People with disabilities want to feel like everybody else, they don't want to be singled out or made to feel like they're excluded," she says. "I want to be able to go out for lunch with a friend and then pop into a department store and find something I like that I can actually wear."

Carol believes she is Australia's – and the world's – first quadriplegic designer.

She is also the first quadriplegic to co-design a collection showcased at the country's premier fashion event, Afterpay Australian Fashion Week (AAFW).

Carol's designs are part of the new Christina Stephens collection and debut runway show from the Adaptive Clothing Collective – a group of three adaptive fashion labels, which aims to provide a 'unified voice for inclusive and adaptive clothing labels in Australia and abroad'.

This year is the first ever adaptive clothing runway in Australian Fashion Week history.

"I don't think I've ever worked so hard in my life, but it's exhilarating, and I wouldn't be doing this – none of this would be possible - without the support of the NDIS," Carol says.

"I've got paralysed hands, I'm paralysed from the chest down. If I want to look at a piece of fabric, I need someone to pass it to me. If I'm having trouble navigating something on the computer, I need assistance. I need a pair of hands and I've got them because of the NDIS.
"The NDIS has changed my life and enabled me to be the best me I can be."

A born problem-solver, Carol began designing clothes after she found there was nothing in the shops

that fitted her altered shape following the car accident, which left her a quadriplegic at 34.

“I couldn't go to the shops and buy what I wanted because there are all these terrible things that happen to your body when you become a quadriplegic; your shape changes, your muscles atrophy,” Carol says.

“Shopping became such a sad experience. I always loved fashion, becoming a quadriplegic didn’t change that. I looked at the situation and thought, ‘Okay, well how do I get around that problem?’ and so I designed my own clothes.”

Forging a new career while also caring for her son and running her own law firm, Carol was invited to showcase a collection at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Festival in Brisbane in 2019.

Now, she has joined forces with fellow Queensland Jessie Sadler as lead designer and co-owner for successful adaptive clothing label, Christina Stephens.

Together, Carol and Jessie hope their work will help bring adaptive clothing into ‘mainstream’ fashion.

“The real issue here is the way you dress not only affects your core sense of identity and your level of confidence, but it directly affects the way the world perceives you,” Carol says.

Carol says her new designs are eye-opening, unexpected and provocative – with one special made-to-order piece.

“There’s something very special that has been designed for the girl that can’t stand up,” Carol says. “I always say to my son – nothing ever changes if everything stays the same, so be that change maker. I hope that’s what this collection will do.”

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