S3 Ep 8 — Innovation in 5: Get Adaptive Apparel that Suits Your Style

**Molly Lazarus** 00:01

Welcome to Changing What's Possible: The Disability Innovation Podcast brought to you by Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation. My name is Molly Lazarus. Today on Innovation in Five we're going to discuss adaptive clothing. Gone are the days when adaptive clothing was just white, Velcro, easy-to-put-on shoes. Today we're hearing from three companies who care about not just does it fit and how easy it is to get on, but they also care about fashion.

**Nicole Cuervo** 00:33

You're excited to wear it. It doesn't feel like a compromise that this is potentially your only option on the market.

**Johannes Sauer** 00:39

We want special items in the adaptive space.

**Hilary Pham** 00:43

We offer people the choice to choose. They can wear the clothes that they already love. They can keep their routines — wear the same exact outfits they've worn for years. They can shop at vintage clothes. They can wear trendy dresses that are from Zara or H & M or some other big-box retailer that doesn't offer adaptive options.

**Molly Lazarus** 00:59

So who are these founders committed to both fashion and accessibility?

**Johannes Sauer** 01:04

My name's Johannes Sauer. I'm the CEO of Cadense adaptive shoes.

**Molly Lazarus** 01:08

But Cadense didn't build their shoe just so that it was easier to get into.

**Johannes Sauer** 01:13

Our founder, Dr. Susko, started the company and all of this with a bigger vision in mind, which was to make walking easier for people that face walking difficulties. So basically, on the bottom of the shoe, on its shoe sole, there's two distinct areas. On the outside of the shoes, there are two nylon pucks, as we call them. It's basically two nylon elements, and nylon has low frictional properties, meaning it slides and that's done in physical therapy today, where if your PT is like, "Oh, I see you're shuffling, you're hiking your hip up, you're circumducting, meaning you're throwing your leg out to the side." Basically, any sort of compensatory movements, they will put a sock on top of it, or duct tape, or they sent you to a cobbler to put leather patches on the bottom of the shoe. And all of that is done so that you can, instead of doing these compensatory movements, you can slide your foot forward, meaning you're normalizing your gait. You're picking up gait speed and all of that stuff. So what we've done is we've put this on a regular shoe while maintaining high friction, so rubber, which is typically what you'll find on an athletic sneaker in the middle, and why that's crucial is because you don't always want to slide. You want to be able to stop and toe for your next step as well. So the shoe glides when you want it to normalize your gait and to make walking easier, but it also sticks when you need it to stop and toe for you next step, and that's something that's never been done before.

**Molly Lazarus** 02:44

Next, I'd like to introduce you to Springrose. Their founder, Nicole Cuervo, was in the 2023 Remarkable cohort, and their goal is to help women get dressed painlessly and independently.

**Nicole Cuervo** 02:56

Our flagship easy-on mobility bra can be put on over eight different ways, making it the world's most versatile bra. You can put it on one-handed. You can put it on by stepping into it, pulling it on overhead, putting it like a vest. We serve over 50 different injuries, illnesses, and disabilities. It's not a silver bullet by any means, so it's not going to work perfectly for every single person, but it does work for most people that try it out, and a lot of the conditions that particularly benefit are people with arthritis, Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, people who have shoulder injuries, whether that's a permanent or temporary condition. It works well for people who have flare ups, so like rheumatoid arthritis or fibromyalgia, because they can loosen it from the front and so as your skin is potentially feeling uncomfortable throughout the day, you can make micro adjustments to the fit. It also works for anybody who has amputations, a limb difference, broke a bone, whatever the case might be. It's very flexible to mobility needs, and you can change how you put it on day to day. So if your mobility changes day to day or week to week, you can keep the same product.

**Molly Lazarus** 04:01

Just like when you put your shoes on every day, Nicole realized that this particular moment of getting dressed in the morning can mean so much more to many people than just putting on clothes.

**Nicole Cuervo** 04:15

Getting dressed is such a basic everyday activity, and I just realized my grandmother struggled with it, and I thought she just didn't know how to search, maybe didn't know how to shop online, and couldn't find any options, and when I looked, there weren't any options available that were functional, comfortable, size-inclusive, and respected a person's dignity. Gave them options that look nice, and for a lot of people, how they look and particularly the clothes they wear, give them a lot of confidence. It's a very important part of their day. So we try and build products that are size inclusive, that are comfortable to wear throughout the day. You're excited to wear it. It doesn't feel like a compromise that this is potentially your only option on the market.

**Molly Lazarus** 04:54

But what about if you've become suddenly disabled and you loved your closet of clothes and now you're staring at an adaptive market that doesn't really work for your fashion. Or what if you've always been disabled and you want to stay up to trend with the fashion industry and what's happening? Hilary Pham has another option for you.

**Hilary Pham** 05:16

Equability is a clothing adaptation service that makes existing clothes easier to wear. So we take the clothes that you love and adapt them using magnets, Velcro, and snap buttons. So we do standardized orders and custom orders as well. So for standardized items, we'll do button down shirt, jeans or slacks, and you can change the challenging functional features of the clothes, so no design or size changes, just changing the buttons to magnets, Velcro snaps, or moving the fly and doing snaps with Velcro. That is all on our website. You can just click through, select the item you want, the material, the color, and then I'll send you a shipping label, you mail it to us. We get a week to do the annotation, and we send it back. So typically, we aim for like, a three to four week turnaround time. For custom orders. You just go on our website, fill out a contact form. I'll probably respond asking some questions. I'll send you a quote, and if things work out, I'll send you a shipping label, you mail it to us and we send it back.

**Molly Lazarus** 06:11

So what kinds of things have they done in custom orders?

**Hilary Pham** 06:15

A lot of people have asked us for seam opening. So we recently worked with the gentleman who's in a wheelchair, he has a seatbelt that goes around his abdomen, that attaches himself to his chair, and he wants it to go under his shirt — he doesn't want it to be over his outfit. So we opened a two-inch hole on both sides of his shirt, along the seam of the existing shirts. He can just thread his seatbelt through, and so you can't see it in the front, but it is still attached to him under his clothes. We've worked with people who are amputees from the knee down, so they wanted a zipper added to the side of their jeans for just the last 12 inches of their pants, for example. That way, they don't have to take off their entire pants. They don't have to struggle to get it over whatever brace they're using, or their prosthetic. Generally, we're just looking at whatever we can do with the clothes, with the seams, adding things, taking away different materials to make clothes easier to wear.

**Molly Lazarus** 07:07

It's incredible the options out there today. Whether you go shopping at Cadense adaptive shoes, look for your latest undergarments at Springrose, or want to adapt your existing closet with Equability. These founders want to make you look great and feel great.

**Molly Lazarus** 07:26

Before you go, listeners, we're excited to let you know about CPARF's upcoming STEPtember campaign, which runs for the whole month of September. Join thousands of people across the country to raise funds for life-changing cerebral palsy research and assistive technology that will positively reshape what it's like to live with a disability. And if you want to pair any physical activities with your fundraising, you can challenge yourself to get moving all September long. Make a team of up to four people and get your friends and family in on the fun. Sign up for free today at www.steptember.us That's S, T, E, P, T, E, M, B, E r.us. Once again, I'm Molly Lazarus, and thank you for joining us for Innovation in 5.