



## IMPACT REPORT 2016

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Styleability is creating scalable social change through adaptive fashion: promoting independence, body confidence and improved self-esteem for young disabled adults.





## INTRODUCTION

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Styleability was first piloted in 2013 by Flamingo Foundation, a charity which empowers vulnerable people through long-term, sustainable solutions that benefit their community and the wider public.

This unique project helps to make fashion accessible for young disabled adults – providing practical guidance on how to adapt clothing helping to inspire body confidence, self-esteem and independent living. The project was created in response to speaking to not only young disabled adults and their families but many special schools, colleges and organisations working with these young people in their transitional years to adulthood (16-25).

The project responds to the frustrations and challenges experienced by young disabled adults who find it almost impossible to find comfortable clothes that suit their style, bodies and needs, impacting on both their ability to lead an independent life but also an increased risk of bullying and social exclusion.

The reach and scope of the project has grown considerably since the first ever workshop and by 2015 Flamingo Foundation realised the potential for real social change through Styleability and it became the charity's flagship UK project.

And this is just the beginning for Styleability, we have such exciting plans for the future and hope this report provides you with an insight into the project, it's impact and our future steps.



## OUR PURPOSE

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Styleability is for young adults whatever their disability, including those with physical disabilities, profound multiple learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. The project aims to make fashion accessible for these young people, with significant long term impact on their lives by:

- Providing a unique programme which teaches young disabled adults, their parents and carers how to adapt the latest fashions to suit their needs and to promote independence;
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem; and
- Enabling social change through influencing our advocacy work with high street retailers, shopping centres and the fashion industry to make fashion accessible right across the spectrum – from the clothes themselves to accessible shopping environments – looking at both physical and mental needs.

*“These sessions were something quite unique for us. Unlike their non-disabled peers, young disabled people do not always have access to creative projects that allow them to highlight what influences them within popular culture including all forms of design and fashion. It’s not often that they get the chance to express this and highlight what influences and inspires them so projects like Styleability delivers a great opportunity to express creatively what they enjoy. It also provides young disabled people with the confidence to express themselves and contribute. A really great project and one we would like to engage again.”*

– John Macneely; Youth Service Manager, Action on Disability

Action on Disability workshops August 2016



## THE PROBLEM WE'RE TACKLING

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"My disability means I am very small so I am forced to wear childish clothes due to a lack of available options in stores. I also need trousers that accommodate incontinence products and the only options tend to be jogging trousers or casual wear. I wish there were more stylish clothing options available to me as I love fashion and want to be able to dress for the age I am and style that suits me!"

– Sam, aged 25\*

### The story in numbers:

**96%** of parents/carers say they find it hard to find clothes to suit their disabled child's body and meet their needs\*\*



56% of young disabled people surveyed need help getting dressed or undressed with 46% saying this made them feel unhappy\*\*



8 out of 10 children with a disability are bullied (Mencap)



In the UK, an estimated 170 disability hate crimes happen every day (Mencap)



89% of young disabled people recently surveyed said that simple adaptations to their clothes (such as replacing buttons with Velcro or zips) would make it easier for them to dress themselves and would make their clothes feel more comfortable to wear\*\*

\*name/age changed for confidentiality

\*\*Styleability survey carried out October 2016

## WHAT WE DO

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Styleability gives young disabled adults, aged 16 to 25 the unique opportunity to work with a fashion stylist and seamstress in their school. The programme involves:

- **Being unique:** each session is uniquely tailored to the needs of the participants in the group. For example, we've delivered sessions focused on creating fashionable bags and pockets to provide cover for feeding tubes and to enable easier and more discreet access to necessary medical equipment (such as colostomy bags). Providing a fun and practical way to maintain people's privacy and reducing the social shunning and disapproval which often results from people being able to see this equipment.
- **Simple adaptations can change lives:** our stylists and seamstresses are on hand throughout the sessions to provide essential tips and ideas on how to adapt clothing to suit the participant's needs. For example, if a young person has poor motor skills, learning how to adapt clothing to use Velcro rather than buttons means they'll be able to dress themselves. Examples of adapted clothing are also showcased at each session to show how simple adaptations can be made.
- **Engaging parents:** not all parents attend our workshops, so we bring their children's experiences back home to them. We help the young disabled adults in our sessions create a style board of their personal style choices, such as colours they favoured, what clothes they liked and samples of fabrics they were attracted to. This style board can be a tool for parents and carers to use to support their children to independently choose clothes.



- **Sensory materials:** we use a selection of materials to engage the young disabled adults throughout the sessions. The stylist will bring a large selection of fashion magazines and imagery of disabled models to promote inclusivity for the participants to create their style boards. To promote sensory learning fabric swatches and perfume samples are also used so the participants can experience different textures and smells.
- **Advocacy work:** we work with retailers to sponsor and participate in our workshops – this engagement gets them to think differently about the shopping experience for young people with disabilities. Outcomes from this area of our work have included shopping centres setting up new autism help points, similar to a lost child point, where young people who are struggling can go for help and care. Also, delivering training for every single staff member on autism awareness to ensure they were welcoming to everyone in their community.
- **Volunteering:** We are passionate about volunteering and promote volunteering opportunities for all areas of the project, from assistant stylists, photographers, bloggers to helping with evaluation and monitoring. We are particularly focused on developing volunteering relationships with universities and colleges which deliver fashion courses.

Disability is underrepresented in fashion so by involving those who aspire to go on and work in the industry, we're encouraging the next generation of fashion designers to open up the fashion world to young people with disabilities.

*"The Styleability session I helped with was so much fun, the young people were able to express themselves through imagery they felt reflected their style. This was really powerful as some participants were non-verbal or incredibly shy however they proudly hung their Style Board and identified their favourite fashion elements. The session was fun, encouraging and messy! I feel really privileged to have taken part."*

Kate, volunteer, aged 29



# WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR



28 unique workshops delivered



Over 400 young disabled adults engaged with – each workshop averages 15 participants



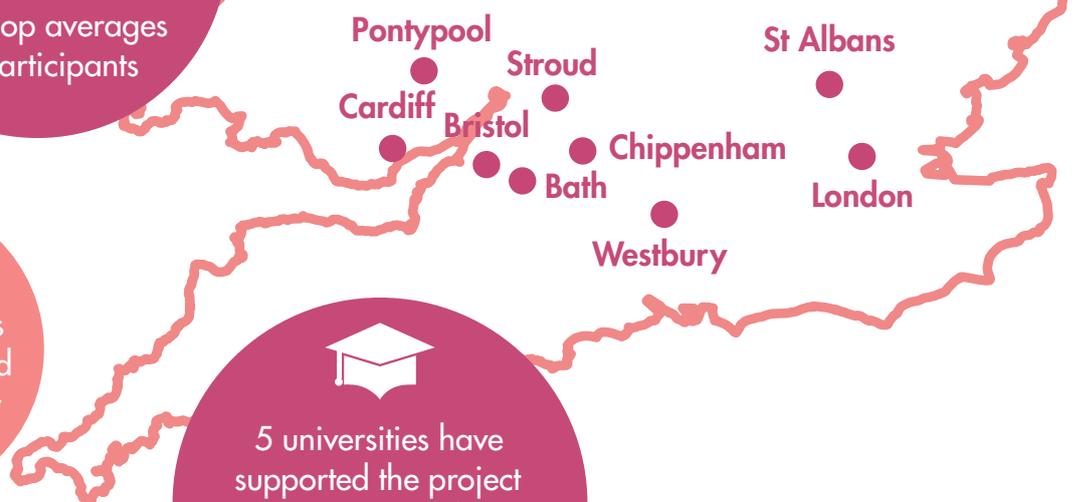
Over 84 teachers and LSA's exposed to the Styleability approach



5 universities have supported the project – with students from Fashion & Design Courses volunteering their time

100% of participants enjoyed taking part in styleability

52% of participants felt more independent and happy after taking part in Styleability



## OUR IMPACT

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We are passionate about making a difference to the lives of disabled young adults, their parents and carers. We want to ensure we understand the impact we are having on their lives and so at the end of each workshop all the young people, teaching staff and volunteers complete a questionnaire (specifically adapted to suit their needs). We also gather feedback direct from parents and carers through online surveys and interviews. We've discovered that we're having a significant impact on people's lives.

### **Impact #1 impact on young disabled adult's lives:**

Young adults with a disability are more likely to be bullied because they're seen as 'different'. For image conscious young disabled people, not 'fitting in' in fashion terms certainly contributes to bullying. Bullying can have a huge impact on a young disabled person's life, resulting in low self-esteem and social exclusion.



Critically, as a direct result of our sessions young people have felt more independent, happy and confident to make decisions about the clothing they wear as said by Joanne Payne, Transitions Coordinator, New Fosseway School:

*"the session encouraged independent thinking – it led to some of our young people having conversations about access into the world of fashion; asking where shops were located and asking about costs of items".*

Importantly through raising awareness and sharing advice and tips on how affordable high street clothing can be adapted to their needs, the young people in our sessions are learning how they can make fashion work for them, enabling them to not only lead their day-to-day lives feeling more comfortable and stylish but allowing them to maintain dignity in the clothes they wear.



Jazz Nightingale, wheelchair user, aged 19 from Stevenage says:

*"I was interested in the session because I like to follow fashion just like other young people. The session helped me think about what sort of styles are on trend at the moment and what would suit me. Learning how you could alter your clothes to suit your own needs was great too. It really helped boost my self-confidence."*

## IMPACT #2 SOCIAL CHANGE

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In addition to our workshops, we are pioneering societal change through working with retailers to get them to think differently about the shopping experience for young people with disabilities. We started working with Eagle One, who own a number of shopping centres across the UK. They sponsored and participated in a Styleability session. They saw how important it was to the young people we helped, how isolated they can be, and how important their own personal dignity and comfort is. They also noted how few social opportunities these children get – something as simple as visiting a local shopping centre which we all take for granted is one of these.

Visiting busy environments like shopping centres can also be overwhelming for someone with sensory issues - with people bustling around, lots of bright lights and a cacophony of different sounds.

As a result, the shopping centre set up a new autism help point, similar to a lost child point, where young people who are struggling can go for help and care. What's more, the shopping centre trained every single staff member on autism awareness to ensure they were welcoming to everyone in their community. This has made a huge difference to young people in the area, and the great news is that it caused such a buzz in the industry that other shopping centres are now taking Eagle One's lead and following suit.



**Phil Maclean, Retail Marketing Manager, Eagle One:**

*“An additional outcome from participating in the Styleability project was that it helped us create a strategy to enable young disabled students to shop safely. This involved our management team undertaking training to further understand and develop a robust handling of potential situations and emergencies in an efficient, caring and appropriate manner. As a Retail Marketing Manager covering large shopping centres, I couldn’t be prouder to be part of Styleability and would love to see other retailers adopting a similar focus.”*

Styleability workshop delivered with support of Emery Gate Shopping Centre, Wiltshire



## IMPACT #3 FAMILIES & CARERS

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Styleability has a powerful impact on not just the young people we work with but their families and carers. We regularly hear from parents who tell us that shopping for clothes is just too overwhelming for their child due to sensory overload and accessibility issues. Our sessions help the young people to communicate with their parents and carers about their clothing choices and sense of style. We also share tips with parents and carers on how they can adapt clothes they find on the high street easily and affordably, helping to overcome some of the barriers to both the shopping experience and availability of options.

*“some clothes are available but they are so much more expensive than regular clothes that it becomes prohibitive. I would like to be able to buy him smart clothes – which he loves – but they don’t have adjustable waists and are uncomfortable for him to wear. We always take him shopping and ask if he likes things before buying them but he finds this overwhelming and so often we will buy items and take them home to try and if he doesn’t like them take them back - hard as he doesn’t like to try things on with the tags still on. Just because you have a disability you’re no different to other young people and it’s important to make fashion accessible to everyone. It’s brilliant that the sessions are open to parents as well so we can gain practical tips on how to adapt clothing”. Diane, mother to Ryan, aged 24\**

\*name/age changed for confidentiality

Specially adapted jacket and dress for wheelchair users



## NEXT STEPS

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We are committed to developing Styleability with sustainability at the heart of the project – expanding the geographical reach of the project to engage more young disabled adults, supporting their parents and carers with tips and advice and advocating for a change in attitudes and approaches from retailers and the fashion industry.

We plan to:

**Advocacy work** - Having already successfully worked with some we want to expand our work with shopping centres and retailers. We'll encourage retailers and shopping centres to support and participate in our workshops to inspire more accessible, safe environments for young adults with additional needs.

We'll advocate for positive change in the representation of disability in the fashion industry. Working with retailers and specialist schools to engage disabled young adults in fashion shows, showcasing adapted high street clothing and powerfully demonstrating the need for more accessible fashion.

**Support for parents and carers** - to engage parents further, we'll bring them together through coffee mornings and events in school settings to help them to adapt clothing to meet their child's needs. Importantly, we'll encourage parents to realise the potential of their child and how small decisions such as what clothes they wear can develop their independence.







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