

Wheelchair users demand a designer future

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Stylish bag for wheelchair users

Too many accessories for wheelchair users still scream disability aid now a team of design students from Brunel University London has teamed up with campaigning website Blue Badge Style to produce stylish accessories. The best chosen by public vote will go forward to prototype stage.

Wheelchair Users Demand A Stylish Future Design students at Brunel

University London are set to inject some glitz and glamour as well as making life a little bit easier for the world's wheelchair users.

They are working with campaigner and founder of the Blue Badge Style website, Fiona Jarvis, to address some key issues. Explained Fiona: "Style and disability should not be mutually exclusive. Stylish accessories for wheelchairs are non-existent. Disabled people badly need some well-designed accessories that aren't just in navy or black!" So she challenged Brunel's final-year product and industrial [design students](#) to address four main areas and the 22 resulting concepts will now go to [public vote](#) to decide which will make it to working prototypes.

They have produced designs which address some key issues for practical, yet chic, wheelchair use:

- Bag – wheelchair users have to hang their whole life on the back of a chair. The bag needs to be secure and accessible while seated, but also make it fashionable and stylish
- Party – A practical cocktail holder. It's hard to hold a drink and wheel at the same time, impossible with a canapé too! Most drinks holders are for water bottles, not cocktails.
- Chair – Style my wheelchair. Chairs are still uncomfortable and come in any colour you like as long as it's black. Comfort and style should be key
- Rain – A waterproof wheelchair cover that also says I'm on trend. It's impossible to hold an umbrella and wheel at the same time. Whilst there are waterproof covers available, they're not very stylish

Other design ideas that came out of the project include a phone charger powered by wheeling, a tablet holder and somewhere for wheelchair users to place a placard on a demonstration!

Added Fiona, who uses a [wheelchair](#), herself: "It has been amazing working with the Brunel students, as they totally understand the importance of combining style with a practical solution. We're looking to develop these ideas as soon as possible, especially as I'd like to be able to use them!"

The project was put together by Brunel's Co-Innovate programme which aims to enhance collaboration between universities, businesses and industry through a focus on design and open innovation.

Brunel's MSc Integrated Design programme director Stephen Green said: "Blue Badge Style was a great fit for us as we are both focused on good design which includes a highly practical element. Our students have a genuine interest in design to improve people's lives, and projects such as this are great opportunities for them to develop greater empathy and understanding of real life experience for wheel chair users. Once voting is completed, we want to develop these ideas into prototypes."

Blue Badge Style is the UK's only company that looks at disability from a style and [design](#) perspective, taking a stylish, pragmatic and cost-efficient approach to inclusive access and lifestyle. "Style is the overriding premise of Blue Badge Style, along with a positive outlook" said Fiona, "disability should not stop you from enjoying life. It's freedom shared!"

More information: Voting begins on Wednesday Dec 3 at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/BLNLDTF

Provided by Brunel University

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