Wunderful idea for women with disabilities wins top prize

Designers use velcro to come up with flirty, easy-to-put-on panty

BY ARILNA ARSHAD

A TASK as mundane as putting on or taking off one's underwear is a challenge for the wheelchair-bound or those with sports injuries.

But now - at least for women with disabilities - a panty has been designed so it does not require one to bend over to put it on or remove it. It is feminine-looking to boot.

Wunder, as it has been dubbed, has won a top design prize for being "easy to put on, flirty and always feminine". It answers special needs women's mobility problems by having velcro fasteners - on one side and at the crotch.

Its design is the work of a 10-man team which beat seven other teams of designers, students and people with disabilities. These teams went head to head to come up with "inclusive design ideas for products or spaces, that is, designs that are practical for everyone to use, regardless of age, sex, or whether they are able-bodied or otherwise."

To up the ante, these designs had to be hatched in 48 hours. Organised by theatre group The Necessary Stage, the design competition is the latest effort to raise awareness of the need for inclusive design.

It was held as part of the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, an annual arts event.

British inclusive-design specialist Julia Cassim, a judge at the competition, said Wunder "sensitively and imaginatively addressed the emotional needs and aspirations of a neglected but significant group of consumers currently disabled by design".

Wheelchair-bound Ms Suveida Mydin, 46, who was on the team that came up with Wunder, complained that underwear now available to special-needs women is "ugly, dingy-like and unisex".

The private tutor, who has been in a wheelchair since a leg operation in April last year, already has two ideas to improve Wunder: Add garters to make it more fitting, and use a breathable material to prevent bed sores.

Other design concepts which won special mention were Zip n Pluck, a paper lunch box and cup with a Ziploc seal; and White, a spherical exercise machine which accommodates a single seated user who pumps hand pedals to propel the ball along a purpose-built track.

The paper lunch box and cup, if developed into a commercial product for use in fast-food outlets, will be heaven-sent for Mr Tan Wee Liam who is partially blind.

The 49-year-old Braille transcriber, who was on the team behind it, has often spilled his packed food and drinks after bumping into people.

He said: "People don’t know I can’t see well and expect me to move away when we approach each other. But when I can’t do that in time, they end up knocking into me."

Other design ideas include hangers with extended arms that allow children and shorter people to reach clothes hung on high racks, and a shelving system where the shelves move up and down at a press of a button.

All that is needed now: companies that will make these designs a commercial reality.

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