Why I'm Building Tri-It On: Rethinking Fashion for Women with Down Syndrome

There's a certain silence that comes with watching someone you love feel left out of something you enjoy. For me, that silence often started in a department store.

I could not recount all of the times I've gone aimlessly searching for my sister Lucy in Macy's, Target, Nordstrom, or Marshalls. We didn't shop together that often, but when we did, my mom ambitiously picked out clothes for both of us. I'd contribute (usually rejecting whatever she held up), while Lucy quietly sifted through racks, drifting farther and farther away with each passing minute. Eventually, my mom would send me to find her. I'd spot her somewhere in the womenswear section, tell her to come back, and she'd reply with a stubborn, "I know," or an all too classic and sarcastic "Matilda…please." When I'd ask if she wanted to try something on, she'd always answer, almost matter-of-factly: "No. It won't fit."

And she wasn't wrong.

Individuals with Down Syndrome often have body types that require specific sizing or design features, details the mainstream fashion industry rarely considers. Lucy has dealt with straps that constantly fall off her shoulders, sleeves and pant legs that run far too long, and shoes that only last a few hours before her bunions and flat feet start to ache. She's sensitive to certain fabrics. She hates turtlenecks, jeans, and the color yellow. But, she loves cozy sweaters, ballet flats, pajamas, any kind of bag or wallet, printed t-shirts, and bath robes, and cotton tanks. Like anyone, she has a distinct sense of style: one that reflects who she is. But unlike most people, she doesn't have the chance to express it. Finding something that fits is hard enough; finding something that feels like her is nearly impossible.

Growing up, I bonded with my mom over clothes. Shopping was a positive ritual, something fun, expressive, and empowering that we all enjoyed. Lucy liked to browse, but she never got to share that same joy. I could always feel the distance. When I was younger, I even stole her clothes (most of them gifts that didn't fit her quite right) because I knew she wouldn't wear them. As I got older, I realized what that meant: my sister had been quietly left out of a space that celebrates womanhood, creativity, and confidence.

That realization stayed with me. Fashion, to me, has always been more than clothing, it's one of the most powerful tools for identity and change. It's where culture shifts, where representation happens. And I'll be damned if I don't see women with disabilities actually represented there. I'm tired of seeing brands sprinkle in disability like tokenism–casting one disabled model in a campaign, only to move on without changing

a single thing about their sizing, design, or accessibility. Representation without inclusion isn't progress. It's performance.

My frustration turned into purpose. I wanted to make shopping something Lucy, and every woman with Down Syndrome, could actually enjoy. I wanted my mom, my grandma, and people like me to be able to find clothes for their loved ones without driving to fifteen different stores, booking endless tailoring appointments, or settling for "good enough."

But it's not just the physical stores that have failed this community. The online shopping space, which promises accessibility and convenience, has become another barrier. Websites are cluttered, sizing guides are inconsistent, and adaptive options are buried or nonexistent. Features like virtual try-ons, simplified navigation, and inclusive sizing filters are treated as bonuses instead of necessities. Even when Lucy shops online, with help from my mom, the process is frustrating and disempowering. The tools meant to make things easier end up reinforcing exclusion.

Fashion and e-commerce alike have been disabling, not because of the people they exclude, but because of the systems they refuse to change. Accessibility isn't just about ramps or alt text; it's about freedom to choose, to explore, to belong.

Tri-It On was born from that gap. It's my way of reimagining what inclusion in fashion can look like: a space where women with Down Syndrome are not an afterthought, but the center. A space that celebrates individuality, comfort, and self-expression. A space where Lucy, and so many like her, can finally say,

"It fits."