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VOY

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to be perfect'**

Rubbish wife, annoying mum and only famous because of her hair. Meet Claudia Winkleman's harshest critic: herself!

had no idea if there would be work out there for her – would brands want a model with Down's syndrome?

For any mother, allowing a teenage girl to go into modelling, particularly in today's world of social media scrutiny and trolling, is not a decision to be taken lightly.

However, for Yvonne any concerns about negativity Ellie might face once in the public eye didn't outweigh her determination to support her daughter's dream.

From the day she was born Ellie has faced judgment, but I would never hold her back in life because some people might be unkind. That's their problem, not hers. I also believed that the majority of people would see her for what she is – a beautiful, inspirational young woman.

But Yvonne's uncertainty whether there would be demand for a model like Ellie has proven to be unfounded, with the teenager landing one high-profile job after another since signing with her agency. And her faith that the public would react positively to her daughter has also been rewarded.

'None of us imagined the Gucci shoot would attract so much attention but out of thousands of comments online, Ellie and I have only seen around half a dozen that are a bit sneery. We just focus on all the supportive comments from people around the world telling Ellie she has inspired them,' says Yvonne.

'I'm doing something I love, and if it helps other people with a disability follow their dreams, that feels great,' adds Ellie.

Yvonne's priority has always been that Ellie enjoys what she's doing, without feeling under pressure to challenge attitudes to Down's syndrome.

'I've raised Ellie to always be herself and enjoy life. But I never want her to feel her life is a mission to change what people think. What's wonderful is that's happening naturally, the more people see of her.'

Laura Johnson is the co-founder of Zebedee Management and set up the agency with her sister-in-law Zoe Procter in 2017. Laura was working as a social worker and Zoe, who had previously been a model, was a teacher for people with learning disabilities when they were inspired to establish their agency, which also represents disabled dancers, presenters and performers.

'We were bemoaning the fact that the young people we worked with who wanted a career in performing arts were hitting a brick wall because it was so hard for them to break into the industry,' says Laura. 'How were they ever meant to get in front of casting directors when there was such a

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death of agencies to represent them?'

Success didn't come overnight, with the agency coming up against ingrained reluctance to use disabled talent.

'It's been three years of doggedly breaking down those attitudes by putting our talent forward for jobs, so they can show what they can bring to a brand or a programme.

'Today we're busier than ever but there's still a long way to go. Less than one per cent of those featured in advertising have a disability, despite the fact more than 20 per cent of the population are disabled. Brands should want to appeal to those customers as well as being inclusive.'

Laura says that in the past it's likely there was an element of tokenism to the use of disabled talent. 'Often it was about being seen to be doing the right thing. However, this movement had to start somewhere, and today consumers are savvy enough to see through token gestures. Brands know it has to be a firm part of their identity, not a one-off.'

Has Yvonne ever worried that her daughter could be used cynically – simply for good PR? 'I really believe the brands Ellie has worked with are genuinely committed



Top, £49.50,  
oliverbonas.co.uk.  
Culottes, £29,  
topshop.com.  
Boots, £99,  
dunelondon.com.  
Ring, £1,100,  
emefacole.com

to diversity in their campaigns. Her images may bring them a lot of publicity but the likes of Gucci hardly need that, do they?'

Bravely honest, Yvonne says she is thankful she didn't know 18 years ago that she was carrying a child with Down's syndrome.

'I really don't know what I'd have done, whether I'd have carried on with the pregnancy. I know I'd have been terrified, anxious how Mark and I would have coped as older parents with a disabled child, and the impact on Amy. I'm relieved we never had to make that decision.

'I'd love to go back in time, though, and tell that paediatrician all about the person Ellie has grown into. How wrong he was to think she would achieve nothing in her life.'

The YOU magazine shoot is a wrap, but it won't be long before Ellie is back in front of a camera, with demand for her ever growing. 'I want to carry on modelling,' she says. 'And also do some acting. I hope the success I've had shows there is an appetite for diversity in advertising, so that more people like me can have these opportunities.'

What is certain is the future is bright; the future is models like Ellie Goldstein. Turn the page for more of our fabulous fashion shoot with Ellie →