

Convoid Cuddlebug

By Laurie Watanabe July 2008

While aesthetics have long played an important role in mobility systems, there is a special need for form to follow function in wheelchairs for the very young. To overwhelmed parents facing their infant's diagnosis, an attractive, appealing mobility system can be the difference between receiving crucial early intervention and making do with a less effective standard stroller.

Convoid's Cuddlebug, therefore, seeks to fill a range of clinical and funding source needs, while also meeting the functional and emotional needs of families with special needs kids.

First, the basics: With a seat depth starting at just 5", Cuddlebug is designed especially for very little clients. In fact, Cuddlebug was created to fill a need for early intervention seating and mobility, says Convoid VP of Sales & Marketing Sue Johnson.

"I was in an early-intervention seminar," says Johnson, "and listening to a therapist who was saying there wasn't something for these really small children who are showing developmental delays. They need to be well seated so they can start therapy, but there really wasn't any equipment designed for bodies that small."

Based on that idea, Johnson says the folks at Convoid asked therapists "what was missing in the market right now in wheelchairs... how small does it need to be? We went through all the different dimensions of the chair, what it needed to do. And we tried to prioritize, because of course a piece of equipment can't do everything."

Maybe not, but the Cuddlebug is a great multi-tasker on dual fronts, as both an early-intervention system and as a caregiver-friendly vehicle.

As a seating and mobility system, Cuddlebug's Hi/Lo function provides 7" of seat-to-floor adjustment, so a child can be at peer level and use kid-sized furniture, but later be at a convenient caregiver height for feeding or therapy — all without switching bases. Cuddlebug also offers 5-30° of tilt, 90-160° of recline, and options ranging from an adjustable-contour headrest to an anterior trunk support, swing-away laterals, two- or three-point pelvic positioning belts, swing-away medial thigh supports, and foot positioners.

As a get-around-town vehicle, Cuddlebug features a generous canopy, under-chair storage basket, a "soft and cuddly" seat, height-adjustable push handle, and scrumptious colors such as grape, peapod and gelato. As much as possible, Cuddlebug's hardware is tucked away "behind the scenes," Johnson says, adding, "We wanted to make it easy to adjust and as tool-free as possible."

Of course, Cuddlebug also has to please payors: "In order for funding to approve this, it has to go through three to five years of growth," Johnson says. "The first five years is a tremendous growth and change period, so that was a challenge." Cuddlebug accomplishes that with a base that can accommodate two seating modules with seat depths from 5" to 10".

Cuddlebug has been seen at a number of springtime rehab shows, and Johnson says therapists and rehab suppliers have appreciated its many positioning functions. More good news for rehab professionals: Cuddlebug has earned SADMERC coding and was undergoing crash-testing as this went to press. But just as importantly, Johnson says Cuddlebug has been getting high marks for its appealing looks. "That's the first thing that you notice: that it's cute, comfortable and soft," she says. To families with special-needs kids, it's those Cuddlebug traits that may make all the difference.

About the author

Laurie Watanabe

Laurie Watanabe is a contributing editor to HME Business Magazine and the editor of Mobility Management.