Haylee's friends

By Michelle Rundle and Emma Birch
This is Haylee with her mummy, daddy and her dog, Toby.

She likes playing hide and seek with her friends, Jack and Molly, looking at books and horse-riding.

She has a special friend called Lily who goes everywhere with her. Lily is a walking frame. She is a bit shy and hides behind Haylee, but she has an important job. She helps her to walk.

Haylee likes to take Toby for a walk with her Daddy after school. One day she asked, “Daddy, why can’t I walk like you do?”
This was an important question. Daddy stopped to think. He was so busy thinking that he didn’t notice Toby had run off to chase a butterfly.

Toby got so excited, he was running, jumping, darting backwards and forwards. Before Daddy could stop him, his lead had got into a big tangled-up knot! It gave Daddy an idea…

“When we take Toby for a walk, I can tell him what to do and which way to go by pulling on his lead,” he said. “When I want to walk, my brain sends messages to my arms and legs to tell them what to do to make me walk.”
“Can you see how tangled up Toby’s lead is now? That makes it much harder for me to tell him what to do and where to go. When you were a baby, something happened to your brain to make it work a little differently. It has a fancy name – cerebral palsy.”

“It means that the messages that go to your muscles sometimes get tangled up – just like this lead. That makes it harder for you to tell your arms and legs to do what you want them to do.”

“That’s why you have Lily. She helps to untangle the messages to your legs.”

Haylee was very quiet walking home with Daddy. That was a very big answer to her question, but she thought she understood. She was very glad she had Lily to help her walk. She was a very good friend.
At home, Haylee got into her super whizzy chair to eat her favourite dinner – spaghetti! The chair could go all the way down to the floor and all the way up to the table, with an adult’s help. She had one at school too and all her friends really liked it.

“Daddy, is my chair like Lily? Does it also help my muscles work better?” she asked.

“Yes, Haylee, it is. It helps you sit up properly so you can draw and write and use your knife and fork more easily. Maybe you should give it a name too. What do you think would be a good name?”

“Charlie!” said Haylee. “Charlie Chair!”
Haylee looked at her spaghetti. It was tangled up just like Toby’s lead had been.

“Mummy, is this how the messages from my head to my arms and legs look? All tangled up? How can we make them work better?” she asked.

Mummy said, “You have lots of friends who help you to do that.”

“Emma, your physiotherapist, gives you exercises and stretches to do to keep your muscles strong. That makes it easier for your muscles to move in the right way.”
“Kerry is your occupational therapist. She makes it easier for you to do the things you want.

“Sometimes that means using nifty gadgets, like the sticky mat that stops your plate sliding when you are eating,” said Mummy.

“Sometimes that means showing us a different way to do things.”

“You have two more friends who help you” said Daddy.

“Do you know what they are?”

Haylee didn’t know. She looked around, but couldn’t see anyone. Daddy smiled. He picked up Haylee’s foot and took off her shoe.

Haylee was wearing a splint. “This holds your foot and your ankle steady so it is easier to walk”.
Haylee knew who her other friend was. “It’s my lycra suit, isn’t it, Daddy?”

“Yes, it is. Your lycra suit helps your muscles relax so that the messages from your brain can go where you need them to go.”

“Wow!” thought Haylee. “I do have a lot of friends to help me!”

That night, Haylee gave Toby an extra pat on the head to say thank you for getting his lead tangled up. He had helped her to understand how her body worked. That made Toby a very good friend too.
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