

Children with Exceptional
Healthcare Needs Network

A Bit of Extra Help



by Di Bumpus

Member of the CEN Experts by
Experience Group

This book belongs to:

Characters

Hi, we are Ben, Mum and Gemma



Hi, I'm Tracey



Hi, I'm the farmer



Hi, I'm Chloe

Hi, I'm Jon



Gemma was excited for a day at the farm. Tracey, Jon and Chloe were already there, with Chloe's mum.

Chloe beamed "Come and see the lambs; they're so funny".

Gemma knew they were a little late. Ben had needed another change as they were getting ready, and Mum had let her watch t.v. a bit longer. Gemma helped carry Ben's bags out the car while Mum wheeled Ben. She wanted to get there as quickly as possible.

Gemma looked up at her mum.

"Off you go" Mum said with a smile; "I'll bring Ben".

Tracey and Gemma held hands as they ran over to where Jon and Chloe were looking at the sheep.



“They’ve got lots of lambs already” said Jon. “Look, that one’s hungry”.

Gemma followed Jon’s pointing finger with her eyes. She saw two lambs standing close to each other, almost underneath a big sheep. One of the lambs was sucking for milk. She could just see the back of its small head going back and forth and its tail wagging from side to side. The other lamb was bigger. Gemma thought it looked at her, before it gave the smaller one a nudge. The small one held on though and kept on sucking.



“Not here” said Chloe’s mum, “But I think there may be some inside we can pet”.

At that moment, Gemma’s mum and Ben arrived to join them by the fence.

“It looks like they’re dancing” giggled Tracey, as they watched another group of lambs bound away. The lambs’ steps were a fun mix of skips and jumps as they leapt towards and with each other.

“They are enjoying the sunshine too!” laughed Gemma’s mum.

“Where are the goats? Ben might like to see them.”

“I think they are nearer the barn” said Chloe’s mum.

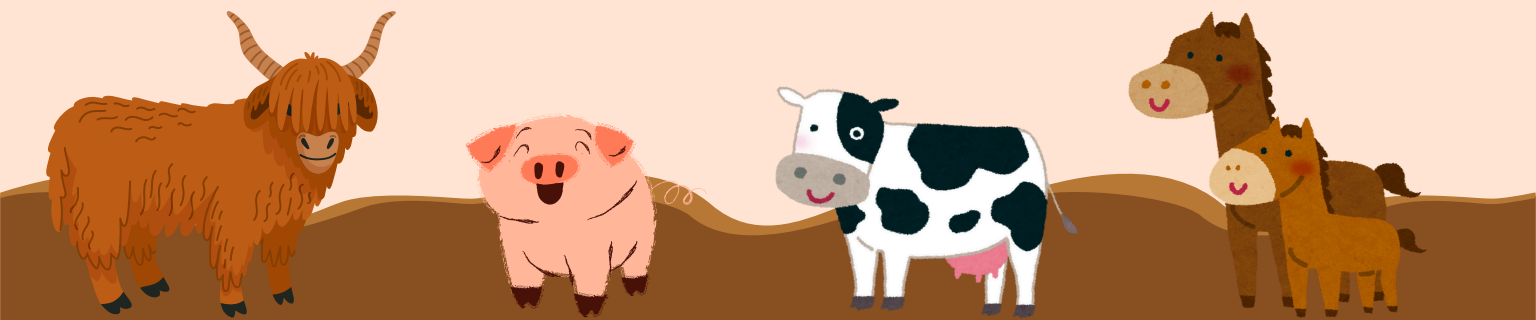
“Let’s go and see.”



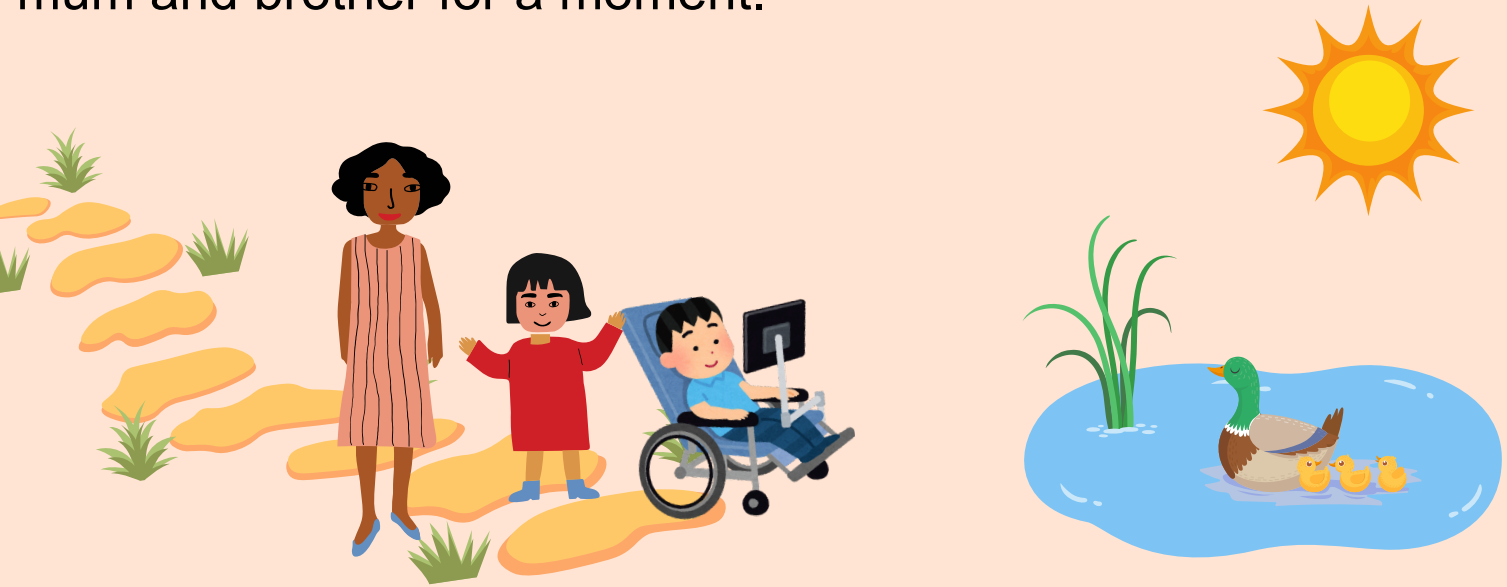
They all set off up the grassy track between the fields. Chloe and Jon led the way, with Tracey and Gemma close behind. The two mums chatted while Gemma's mum pushed Ben.

They passed cows, some black and white, some brown who were chewing big mouthfuls of grass. They saw three horses, which stayed quite far away. The smallest velvety black one turned its head and took a few steps towards them when Jon called.

There were highland cattle, with big horns growing out from their shaggy coats. The pigs were not out in their muddy field; but they saw them sleeping inside their hut as they got closer. They could hear them snoring too. Jon joked that he was jealous they got to lie in.



Beyond the pigs were a pair of alpacas and then the goats. Tracey spent a long time watching the friendly alpacas with their curly coats and long necks. And as his mum predicted, Ben loved the goats. When Ben arrived, the others were moving toward the duck pond. Gemma hung back with her mum and brother for a moment.



Mum turned Ben in, up close to the fence. There were five goats altogether in the field. Two black and white ones were taller than Gemma when they were standing up and three small pygmy goats. One of the big goats started to walk over. It seemed curious as it approached the fence. It pushed its head, with white beard and small horns, over the top towards them.

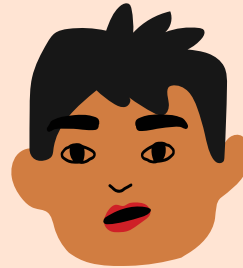
Gemma looked at Ben. He wasn't smiling and she wasn't sure if he was really looking at the goat or not. But she could sense he was listening and concentrating hard. Gemma took Ben's hand and felt his fingers gently wrap around hers. The goat shook its head and gave a long bleat. She heard a small sound, as if in reply, come from Ben. "We had better not get too close, Ben," she heard Mum say; "In case the goat wants to nibble you". Gemma looked up at the goat. It seemed happy to see Ben too.

"Come on Gemma, the play park's round the corner, there's a zip wire!". Chloe's words rushed from her as she ran back. Gemma gently gave Ben his hand back, looked up at Mum, and ran on to join in.



Back over to the benches the mums had set out some lunch. Gemma was thirsty. She was glad to take a good long drink of water from her bottle before looking at the sandwiches, crisps, and treats.

“What about Ben, isn’t he having some?”



asked Jon, as he munched though another cheese sandwich. Gemma felt her face flush and looked over to her mum. She had forgotten that Jon had not been out with Ben before.

“Ben can’t eat sandwiches” Mum explained. “I’ve got some of his special milk for him to have through his tube”. Jon looked unsure. “The tube takes the milk straight into his stomach to make it easier for him’ said mum.

Some of Ben's friends have feeding tubes which go straight into their stomachs, called "gastrostomies". Ben's tube goes into his nose, then down his throat to his stomach. Gemma knew this "nasogastric" tube looked strange to people who weren't used to it. She sometimes wished that Ben could have a gastrostomy so that people would stare less.

Gemma watched as Mum got out the syringe and gave Ben a little flush of water first. Then Mum connected the end of Ben's tube to his feeding pump and turned it on, so he would get his milk. Gemma was used to this. At home Ben sometimes ate the same things as her at teatime, but all mushed up with plenty of water, and with Mum feeding him with his special spoon. When he was tired or ill, he had most of his meals like this. He also had all the medicine he needed through his tube.



Ben having his tube was good on days like today though. Ben usually took longer than her to eat his food. With his pump on, they could carry on doing things, instead of having to wait while Mum finished feeding him.

Gemma felt a gentle shove to her shoulder.

“Do you want a cake, Gemma?” Chloe asked. She was holding out a box. “We made them yesterday,” said Chloe. Gemma looked in and picked out a cupcake covered in yellow icing. “Thankyou “she said. Chloe always made good cakes.



A little later it was time to go up to the barn. As they went in, a donkey greeted them. It had its nose out over the side of the pen. They all gave the donkey a gentle rub at the top of its head. Gemma was surprised how coarse its coat felt. There were also rabbits and guinea pigs which looked so lovely and soft.



The three baby lambs looked up at Gemma as she approached the side of their pen, just then the farmer stepped into the pen and the lambs looked towards him. They crowded round him, pushing their heads and necks upwards as they circled his legs.

“You first today” he said, as he pulled a bottle from his overall pocket. He turned the bottle upside down and moved the teat towards the lamb’s mouth. The lamb latched on to the bottle and started drinking the milk.

Gemma watched its neck moving back and forth, and its tail wagging just as she had watched the lambs in the field earlier. The bottle was empty in no time. The lamb gave its head a shake and skipped away. The farmer reached for the next lamb and the next bottle.



Gemma’s friends were busy with the rabbits and guinea pigs. A woman was lifting a rabbit in her arms and holding it at the fence for them to stroke its fur. Mum had Ben by the goats, but Gemma turned back to the lambs. The farmer saw Gemma watching closely.

“Would you like to give the lamb some milk?” he asked. Gemma looked back at him. “Can you hold on tight? They pull hard; you have to hold on tight to the bottle. I will help you” he said. Nervously, Gemma nodded. The farmer carefully opened the pen gate with his back to the lambs, just enough to let her through. Then he closed it again behind her. He brought the last lamb, round in front of him. He moved them all a little further back in the pen and reached into his pocket for the last bottle.


“Here, hold it tight around the middle. Use both hands, and not too close to the teat. I will help you at the end.”



Gemma carefully put one hand round each side of the bottle. Suddenly Gemma felt the bottle being pulled away from her as the lamb began to suck. Gemma was surprised how strong the lamb was. Soon, the bottle was finished, and the lamb was wagging its tail. The farmer told Gemma to let go as he carefully took the bottle from the animal's mouth.

There was a bit more time at the play park, and even time for ice cream before the end of the day, Jon thought his favourite thing was the horses. Chloe liked the rabbits and Tracey the alpacas. Mum thought Ben's most special thing was the goats; but for Gemma it was the lambs.



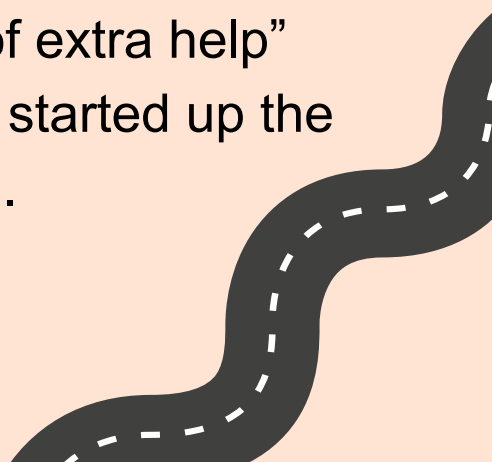


“Why do some of the lambs get bottles and some get milk from their mums?”

“Most of the lamb’s suck milk from their mothers until they are big enough to start eating grass. Sometimes some just need a bit of extra help. The farmer helps these lambs by giving them bottles.”

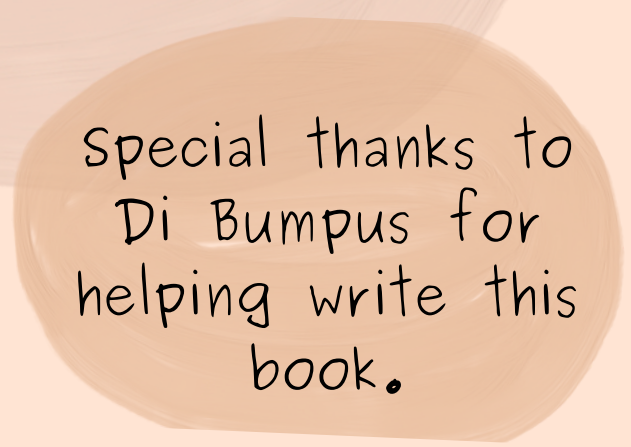
They had all the bags in the car and Gemma was watching her brother as Mum strapped down his chair, before Gemma got in next to him. Ben looked up at her with a hint of a smile in his eyes, a bit tired after a busy day.

“Maybe a bit like you, Ben. The lambs have their bottles, and you have your tube. You all just need a bit of extra help” Gemma said, as she smiled back. As Mum started up the engine, Gemma reached out for Ben’s hand. She relaxed into the special feeling of Ben’s fingers curling gently around hers.





The End



Special thanks to
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