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Wheels of freedom
USU lab makes unique tricycle for disabled girl

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The Christmas magic will shine a little brighter in one house this year after Katelyn Roberts, a 6-year-old diagnosed with cerebral palsy, received her first tricycle — specially designed by the Utah State University Assistive Technology Lab to suit her needs.

Katelyn is a typical kid, full of energy and just dying to burn it off outside, according her mother, Tammy Roberts. Originally from Brigham City, Katelyn is not able to interact with the neighborhood kids because of her disability that resulted in lacking mobility and communication skills.

"Katelyn will hear kids outside playing and try to figure out how to be a part of it," said Tammy. "She is such a happy little girl, she just wants to be able to play with other kids."

The trike is painted Katelyn's favorite color, yellow, with specially designed cushions and foot straps for comfort and control. Her mother has some guiding control with a long handle that allows her to walk behind her daughter. The trike is also accessorized with every little girl's dream — a front handlebar basket.

As Katelyn drove around the hallways at Utah State on her new trike last week after receiving it, her mother smiled with joy when she said Katelyn is a happy, healthy child who just has a disability.

"We have been waiting for two years for somebody to help make one," said Tammy. "Now she can play with the other kids."

Roberts approached the lab to help Katelyn interact with other children. Together, Roberts and Stan Clelland, an assistive technology specialist at the lab, planned how to modify a tricycle specifically for Katelyn's needs.

Amy Henningsen, an occupational therapist for the Center for Persons with Disabilities at USU, said the trike will help build muscle and balancing skills, but most of all it provides independence and opportunity and helps build self-esteem.

"It's an equalizer," Henningsen said. "It gives her an opportunity to keep up with the others."

The lab assists individuals of all ages with disabilities and their family members by fabricating, adapting or modifying assistive technology and everyday items used at home, school, work or recreation. A computer lab is available to experiment with assistive technology computer software and accessories as well.

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