

To the Recipient of the Allan Craig Stephens Annual Scholarship:

I am the mother of Craig Stephens, and I started this scholarship in 2024 to carry-on my son's legacy throughout his life and beyond. I would like to share a little bit of that with you. As a child, he didn't want to be held, wasn't able to talk, didn't play with toys, and was in his own world. At the beginning, we didn't know why. Throughout childhood, he was given different diagnoses such as being mentally retarded and having schizophrenia. Craig was not diagnosed with autism until he was 21 years of age. Today, Craig is more verbal, loves music, watching Jeopardy, bowling, and going to church. Most of all, Craig loves his family.



Throughout my life, and through fighting for Craig, I have realized the need for empathetic and competent professionals working within the autism spectrum disorder field. As his parents, we were told we were unfit, Craig was overmedicated, Craig was hospitalized and physically abused, and was even rejected from the public school system. Craig was denied services because of his behavioral issues. Craig faced bullying from other children, adults, and families within our neighborhood. As his mother, I tried to create some resources and connections for Craig within our community. I started a summer day camp program for individuals with disabilities. I was also able to start a program within our church for individuals with disabilities to be able to learn more about their faith. Later on, I started a respite care program for adults with disabilities who were too old for school and had nowhere else to go. One of the reasons I started this scholarship is because I don't want people to have to go through what we as Craig's parents experienced.

To you as the recipient:

One of the reasons why I chose Missouri Southern, and the social work program is because my granddaughter, Rachel, graduated from it. The need for social workers in general is great, but especially ones who desire to work with individuals who have autism. I commend you for having the passion to gain knowledge about working with individuals with ASD and wish you every success in your career to help make life better for people like Craig.

Make me proud,

Constance "Connie" Stephens