

Tennessee Tech engineering students create walker for boy with Angelman Syndrome

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Kyle Kitts, a two-year-old with Angelman Syndrome, was presented a new walker constructed by a group of Tennessee Tech students in Stephen Canfield's early intervention and mechanical engineering project class. Gathering at the Tennessee Early Intervention office in Cookeville for the presentation were Kyle and his parents Gabriel Kitts (front, left) and Deanna Miller (front, right) along with (back, from left) Stephen Canfield, Tennessee Tech mechanical engineering professor; Amber Hargis, early interventionist; Ashton Dement, group member; Logan Watson, group member; Nathan Parkinson, group member; Heather Craig, service coordinator; Celeste Conaway, group member; and J.P. Nelms, group member.

Thanks to a group of Tennessee Tech engineering students, a young boy with Angelman Syndrome received an early Christmas present.

Students in Stephen Canfield's early intervention and mechanical engineering project class built a walker for two-year-old Kyle Kitts. The students recently presented the walker to Kyle and his mother, Deanna Miller, and father, Gabriel Kitts.

"I'm so happy. So happy!" Miller said. "I know he's going to be into everything, but it's so worth it. This is really going to help him put some weight on his legs. We are one step closer to him being able to walk."

Kyle, who will be three years old in March, was diagnosed with Angelman Syndrome, a rare neuro-genetic disorder that includes developmental delay, lack of speech, seizures, and walking and balance disorders, just a couple of weeks after he was born.

"They did a spinal tap to find out why he wasn't swallowing," Miller said. "They found he didn't have a chromosome 15. They found it was from the mom's side, and when the chromosome 15 is missing from the mom's side, it's called Angelman Syndrome."

Knowing he wasn't going to be able to walk on his own, Miller said they began shopping for a walker. Kyle needed a bigger walker than what was available at retail stores.

"They were really small," Miller said. "They were so low to the ground it was hard for him to stretch his legs."

Working through the Tennessee Early Intervention System, the group of Tech students — Nathan Parkinson, Logan Watson, Ashton Dement, Celeste Conaway and J.P. Nelms — met with Kyle and his parents at the beginning of the fall semester. Once they saw Kyle and knew what his parents had in mind, they went to work.

"We thought this project would be a good challenge for us," said Parkinson, a junior mechanical engineering major. "We wanted to make it light, and we also wanted the walker to fit him and grow with him. I knew this was going to be a big undertaking, but it feels good to know we impacted somebody's life with our project."

With Amber Hargis, his early interventionist, Heather Craig, the TEI service coordinator, Canfield and his parents on hand, the group presented Kyle with his walker at the Tennessee Early Intervention office in Cookeville.

"It's wonderful to see him in the walker," said Craig. "His smile just lights up the day."

Canfield was also smiling and very proud of his students, who received an "A" for the project.

"I like to see how they can make a difference in someone else's life, but also how they grow during the semester while they are working on a project," Canfield said. "At the first of the semester, they are nervous. By the end of the semester, you can see the confidence and how they have grown."

Other groups in Canfield's class also had projects that helped kids with special needs. From climbing walls to wheel chairs and bikes, a complete list of projects and information about EIMI can be found at http://ttu-eime.csc.tnitech.edu/index.php/Main_Page.



Kyle Kitts, a two-year-old with Angelman Syndrome, uses his new walker constructed by Tennessee Tech students in Stephen Canfield's early intervention and mechanical engineering project class.