

## **Mother benefits from - Austin American-Statesman (TX) - December 1, 2009 - page B01**

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In 2006, Niesha Griffin was close to finishing her bachelor's degree in biology when she became pregnant with twins. Amaya was born at 21 weeks and later died. Avery, born at 23 weeks, survived. He has lung disease and cerebral palsy. Griffin put her education on hold, but her dream of becoming a nurse stayed with her. Two years ago, Griffin was nominated by Any Baby Can to be part of the Austin American-Statesman's Season for Caring campaign. Each year, the campaign chooses 12 families nominated by Central Texas nonprofit agencies. Donations of cash, goods and services take care of the featured families' needs first, then help other families served by the agencies. Readers were struck by Griffin's determination and dedication to Avery. They gave and gave. Any Baby Can was able to set up a college fund for Griffin. This month, Griffin graduates from the University of Texas. And she still has enough money to pay for nursing school. She's researching programs and hopes to start classes in the fall. And 3 1/2-year-old Avery has come a long way from where he was two years ago. He goes to preschool five mornings a week through an Austin school district program for children with disabilities. He knows some sign language. He's no longer hooked up to a ventilator, and hopefully after flu season subsides, he'll be able to have his tracheostomy tube removed. He has a new wheelchair and is learning how to make it roll. Griffin's mantra is to keep moving ahead. And it's a message she gives to her son in her positive attitude. "He will walk," she says. "We have to keep moving forward with it." She wants other moms who are struggling to finish their educations to know that "It can be done." Other moms such as 18-year-old Amy Hembree, who was nominated by LifeWorks for this year's Season for Caring campaign, which began Sunday. Hembree and her 8-month-old daughter, Willow, live with her mother-in-law, but Hembree dreams of fixing up a mobile home she owns to have a place for her daughter. Willow was born with spina bifida, a malformation of the spinal cord. Hembree does not leave her daughter's side. She has learned skills many of us will never need, such as how to clean a tracheostomy tube. Although Hembree wants to first meet Willow's needs and have a repaired or new mobile home, she would also like to start college, maybe by taking online classes at first. To find out more about the Hembree family, contact LifeWorks, 735-2400. For more information on Season for Caring, call 445-3903 or e-mail [seasonforcaring@statesman.com](mailto:seasonforcaring@statesman.com). To make a donation, see page A9 or [statesman.com/seasonforcaring](http://statesman.com/seasonforcaring). [nvillalpando@statesman.com](mailto:nvillalpando@statesman.com); 912-5900"