

**VSA Florida – Student of the Month
April/May 2018**



Eight-year-old **Jaden Blunt** was nominated by his art teacher, Angie Brahim, from Oakcrest Elementary School in Ocala. Ms. Brahim describes Jaden as a “wonderful and imaginative student”. Jaden loves art! His artwork, mostly in simple black or blue ink, “is his best way of communicating”, Ms. Brahim explains. She helped him develop an extensive portfolio highlighting the amazing detail he

captures in each piece. She writes, “Jaden’s art does not come from instruction or examples, but from his own creative mind and heart. It is how he expresses himself; the detail of his work would shock anyone, especially for his age and [learning] disability.” As a strong advocate for Jaden, Ms. Brahim has submitted many of his pieces to the prestigious FAFO Art Festival (Fine Arts for Ocala).



Twelve-year-old **Michael Beauford** was nominated by his classroom and choral teacher, Luis Rios, from Spessard L. Holland Elementary School in Bartow. Mr. Rios shared through his nomination what research tells us...the arts make a difference in children’s lives, sometimes more obviously in those that lack typical ways of communicating. Michael, who began his early life not sharing through words, has become a successful and integral member of his music class and afterschool chorus, the “Spessard Singers”. Michael has blossomed, performing alongside his school peers in musicals such as “*A Night on Broadway*” and “*Moana*”, and has even performed an occasional short solo. “Music has become a way for Michael to express himself in a way in which he feels comfortable,” Rios writes. “He takes such ownership that he even keeps track of students that are not standing in their spots in chorus and if they forget the words, he is quick to remind

them.” Anxiety and typical autistic social skills melt away for Michael in Mr. Rios classroom. He writes, “This is why seeing his attitude and demeanor during music and chorus is so impressive.” Michael is also involved in the school’s Robotics Club learning to build and program robots created with Legos.



VSA Florida is pleased to announce 16-year-old E.R. as one of their May 2018 Students of the Month. School Counselor, Pamela Smith nominated this student, who attends Broward Youth Treatment Center in Ft. Lauderdale. She writes, “E.R. is a student who has discovered art as an alternative but creative way to communicate, gain an understanding of himself, and interact with his peers. He loves exploring through art and making sense of the world in a visual, tangible and enjoyable way.”

E.R. discovered his passion in 5th grade when he was recognized for his sketching, drawing and painting skills in a school art contest. Recently participating in a VSA Florida residency program, E.R. was influential in not only demonstrating his visual art skills on a classroom mural, but revealed that this creative environment enabled him to shine as a leader among his peers.

Digital art software using his computer has recently peeked E.R.’s interest. He explains that he finds it similar to traditional painting, while allowing him to manipulate his designs and add graphics to his images.

E.R. lights up when discussing or showing off his creative drawings. He continues to develop his expressive skills through the arts which gives him an edge on analyzing the world around him. Outside of art making, E.R. enjoys baseball and played for a community league. Dr. Smith is delighted to witness the development of E.R.’s self-esteem, in and out of the classroom. She states, “To know him is to love him! To see his artwork is to love it, too!”