

Arts4All Florida
Students of the Month
April 2021



12-year-old **Lilithve Nichols** is a young clarinetist who attends Turkey Creek Middle School in Hillsborough County. She was nominated by Jennifer Houston, an ESE specialist. Since starting in her middle school's Access Points Curriculum just two years ago, Lily quickly gravitated towards music by choosing band as her elective. After one year, she learned to play the clarinet and has moved on to adding two additional instruments- the flute and piano.

Lily was previously nonverbal but with her musical advancement, she has also grown in her communication skills. Arts4All Florida reached out to Lily's mom, Stephanie Huffman, who provided further insight to Lily's growth: "Lily has gained confidence in herself, is willing and motivated to become more independent to gain greater participation in band and is talking about wanting to play in band in high school." Lily's advancement in

her musical skills have also translated to her progress in other subjects such as math and American Sign Language. Lily's dedication in music is indicative of the indispensable benefits of the arts for students on the Autism Spectrum, as well as those with other neuro diversities or disabilities.

Although the covid-19 pandemic has moved many arts programming remotely, Lily maintains a cheerful disposition and is the most excited for band lessons. When the 2020 school winter concert was cancelled, Lily and her mom worked together to put on a virtual program for friends and family. Lily performed multiple songs and presented research about each of the musical pieces. Today, Lily participates in band without any additional assistance from a paraprofessional. Lily's mom says how "this has been her greatest opportunity for inclusion in her entire educational career." Recently, Lily has indicated "that she would like to teach music to students with autism because she 'understands how their brains work because I have autism, too...'" Clearly, music has not only served Lily therapeutically but is also giving her confidence in social environments. Mrs. Houston has pointed out how "[she] is always asking adults if they play instruments. She uses this to start a conversation with them."



19-year-old **Noah Jackson** is a multimedia artist and ceramicist who attends Eau Gallie High School's BLAST Program in Brevard County. He was nominated by Dina Casablanca, his classroom teacher. Dina met Noah just last year during an IEP meeting. Since starting in art classes, Noah has shown significant improvements in his behavior and has taken to exploring new artistic mediums. Dina described how "[we] were pleasantly surprised, especially since his previous teachers shared some of Noah's challenges...I no longer have any concerns. Noah has had an amazing year, due in large part to art." These improvements attest to the therapeutic benefits the arts can offer students with a language impairment as well as those on the Autism Spectrum.

Arts4All Florida was impressed at the range of artistic skills Noah has developed. He engages in a variety of art mediums including vinyl, drawing, pottery, and even works with fused glass. Dina said, "after being shown once, he

was on it, making his own color choices and cutting his own glass...We couldn't be more pleased!" Noah's growing interest in creating works has also helped him use art as a tool for self-regulation. "When the noise level in the classroom gets too loud, Noah will take out his colored pencils and paper or adult coloring sheets. This has helped Noah stay calm and refocus. He is better able to ignore what's going on around him and settle himself when he uses art as his outlet."

Although he has only been working creatively this last year, Noah has made tremendous gains that have impacted other parts of his life. Recently, Noah has participated in volunteer opportunities and vocational trainings. He helps out at House of Hope, a community resource center that provides food and clothing to those in need. Noah and his peers assist in the soup kitchen and sorting items for the thrift shop. He has also started volunteer work at the local Brevard Zoo and participates in Special Olympics programs.