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Arts4All Florida  
University of South Florida  
[www.arts4allflorida.org](http://www.arts4allflorida.org)

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Miami-Dade County Student Named Arts4All Florida  
September 2021 Student of the Month

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Arts4All Florida is pleased to announce 15-year-old Valentina Elias as one of their September 2021 Students of the Month. Valentina was nominated by Ruby Issaev, the Executive Director and owner of Vladimir Issaev School of Classical Ballet. Since the age of 9, Valentina joined the Vladimir Issaev School for dancing, piano, and singing lessons. Ruby writes, “she has always impressed us with her tenacity and her passion for the arts.”

Valentina is a sophomore at Miami Arts Charter (MAC) High School in Miami-Dade County. She participates in the Musical Theater Program at MAC and the Broward Center for the Performing Arts after school programs. Ruby described how Valentina is consistently ready to help with the younger students at the Ballet school, organizing them, playing games, and taking care of them backstage before their performances. “Valentina has always been very involved in the community and [is] always looking into ways to help others.” Arts4All Florida was wowed not only by Valentina’s various talents but also her commitment to helping others on and off the stage.

Valentina was born with profound unilateral hearing loss and thus works to raise awareness of the challenges that the Deaf and hard of hearing community experience. Her latest project has been founding her own company, Smile Guard <https://smileguard.me/>. As part of a school assignment, Valentina created a homemade mask with a clear window to help the Deaf and hard of hearing to read lips and facial expressions. After much research and development with her family, she founded Smile Guard last year and now sells the masks online. Valentina donates masks to health professionals and educators in the community while raising money for the Starkey Hearing Foundation. One of her goals is to save up for college to attend New York University. She plans to pursue a degree in the arts, specializing in musical theatre, and continue to help her community.

Arts4All Florida looks forward to recognizing Valentina in our newsletter, highlighting her on our website and sending her a personalized trophy. The Arts4All Florida Student of the Month Program is designed to increase public awareness and recognize the impact arts make on students with disabilities statewide. Students who participate in the arts develop creativity, have increased self-confidence, understand teamwork, have increased language and math skills and are generally more engaged. For more information about the Student of the Month program and others, please visit [www.arts4allflorida.org](http://www.arts4allflorida.org).

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