

VSA Florida Student of the Month  
October 2017

VSA Florida is proud to announce **Makayla Shaw** and **Brandon Brooks** as the October 2017 Students of the Month.



13-year-old **Makayla** was nominated by Vicki Lightfoot, her ESE Teacher and Department Head from Deerlake Middle School in Tallahassee. Ms. Lightfoot writes, “Art for Makayla is her love, her connection and her passion. It has allowed me to get to know her better and to see the world through her perspective.” Makayla has autism and came to Deerlake Middle School as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader last year with very few verbal skills. Not coming from a local feeder school, she knew no one and was unresponsive to completing written work, she would only draw. After working for months with the school’s art teacher, Makayla has turned from a shy outsider to sharing her artistic talents with her student peers. Makayla recently joined the Anime Club at school with hopes of meeting like-minded friends. Makayla’s nomination demonstrates that art can be a form of communication, even for, as Ms. Lightfoot explains, “this sweet, quiet, withdrawn young girl.”



19-year-old **Brandon** was nominated by Lila Vivi, an ESE Student Support Coordinator from Trinity Catholic High School in Ocala. Ms. Vivi writes, “Our students and faculty have grown to love Brandon over the last two years and can’t wait to see what the future holds for him.” Brandon is a talented artist and outstanding cartoonist, creating artwork for the characters in his show, “The Best of Brandon Brooks”. He has produced many works, all of which project his personal enjoyment of this creative visual art outlet. Ms. Vivi explains, “[Brandon] is always full of ideas and they spill out with such exuberance, it’s hard not to be in awe!” This young man’s extraordinary talents are no surprise to VSA Florida! Brandon has attended the VSAFL “Animation Gets Real”, a summer camp designed for students on the spectrum who would like to excel in computer animation or iPad music, for the past three years. Brandon is involved in his community as an ASD advocate and recently designed the Autism Awareness Walk t-shirt for Marion County. He is also a member of the National Honor Society based on his high GPA and moral character.

In the coming weeks, VSA Florida is looking forward to presenting Makayla and Brandon with their gift certificates and personalized trophies for winning this prestigious award.