

Ezscreen Helps Art Therapy Miracle

Five-year-old Deontay Isaac of Philadelphia, a patient at Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children, does not need words to tell her story. The artwork-lined walls of her hospital say it all.

Deontay was brought to the University of Mississippi Medical Center for treatment after a car accident. She was diagnosed with ventilator-dependent quadriplegia, or paralysis of her arms and legs.

For an active child like Deontay, suddenly discovering that she was paralyzed was devastating. Lying in her hospital bed, she could only see her limitations.

“When she first came in, she was very depressed and very irritable,” said Heather Glenn, a pediatric intensive care unit nurse. “Sometimes she would lie awake the entire night.”

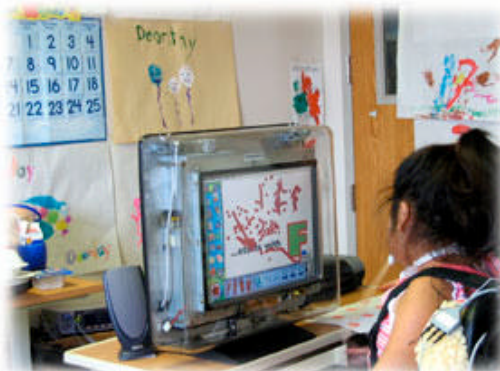
“She wasn’t enthusiastic about anything,” said Carlston Isaac, Deontay’s grandfather. The challenge was to motivate her to help herself. Being only four years old, she was too young to enter the hospital school program and her condition was too serious for her to leave the pediatric intensive care unit. She needed someone to come to her.

Charla Bullard, registered art therapist, and the Batson Hospital art therapy program, provided the solution.

Art therapy uses a combination of art and psychology to help patients develop their cognitive and physical abilities, explore their interests and express their thoughts, feelings and fears. Unlike art for art’s sake, which focuses on the finished piece, art therapy focuses on the process of creation itself. “I tell my patients, ‘you don’t have to be an artist’” said Bullard. “You can draw stick figures and still do art therapy. The important thing is to express yourself in whatever way you feel comfortable.” “When I met Deontay the first time, she was passive and avoided eye contact. She only spoke to ask for water. Our goal was to increase her communication and participation.”

Bullard broke the ice by offering to draw anything Deontay wanted. She asked Bullard to draw a purple, blue, black and yellow butterfly and she insisted on one specific detail. The butterfly had to have eyes.

Over the next several months, Bullard and Deontay worked on different art projects together. Initially, Deontay operated as an “art director.” She would dictate to Bullard what she wanted drawn and



(UMC photos by Jay Ferchaud)

Deontay Isaac, Batson Hospital patient, learns the letter “F” with the art therapy program’s “All-in-One” Touchscreen PC.



Charla Bullard, left, Batson Hospital art therapist, watches as Deontay Isaac draws.

Bullard would draw or paint the image. By selecting the image/shape, color, size, and placement, Deontay gained ownership of the work. As their work progressed, Bullard and Deontay practiced hand-over-hand drawing and painting, a technique in which Bullard guided Deontay's hands. Eventually, Deontay could hold a paint brush in her mouth and paint on her own.

"After she began working with Miss Charla, she started coming out of her shell," said Isaac. "Art was the first thing that clicked with her," said Judy Mullins, pediatric social work supervisor. "It was the one subject that put a sparkle in her eye. It made her happy. This showed her that she could do something."

Although Deontay was improving, her progress was slowed by the tools available to her. She could paint or draw by holding pens or brushes in her mouth, but she had to have help changing colors and moving the paper. This process not only was laborious, but it also hampered Deontay's burgeoning independence.

The breakthrough came with the arrival of a printer and an Ezscreen® RxKiosk® "All-in-One" Touchscreen PC donated by the Katherine Townsend Terral-Jessica Shelby Ferris endowment. This fund supports early intervention and art therapy in Batson Hospital. The computer is operated by touching its screen, so it could be controlled with a mouthstick which meant that Deontay could run the computer independently.

Loaded with Kid Pix® Deluxe 4 software, the RxKiosk® gave Deontay more creative freedom. The software has tools to draw, paint, insert clip art, create shapes, and write text. It also has audio capabilities that pair sounds with different activities and verbalize written text so Deontay could create both visually and acoustically.

Deontay enthusiastically adapted to working on the computer. By the end of the first session, she could independently launch the software and only needed a little assistance. She even said, "Bye computer," when Bullard left.

After the next few sessions, Deontay was adept enough to print her artwork herself. "When she started to print, she said 'I'm going to be happy,'" said Bullard. "She printed four copies of the picture to share with everyone."

"Deontay was anxious to work on the Ezscreen® RxKiosk® computer. She would say 'Hurry up please,' if I were slow getting it set up and she would tell you 'I'm busy,' if you tried to talk to her while she was working."

Deontay even surprised Bullard with her ingenuity. Initially, Deontay had trouble moving her mouthstick where she wanted it and needed help. "Then she figured out how to twirl the mouthpiece to move it up and down," said Bullard. "She no longer had to ask, 'Miss Charla, up.'"
Without Deontay realizing it, the fun she was having in art therapy also helped her other abilities. Working with the mouthstick strengthened her neck muscles and improved her motor skills. This helped her learn to operate her wheelchair and reinforced her work with her occupational and physical therapists.

Art therapy also helped Deontay educationally. During each art therapy session, Bullard chose a letter for Deontay to learn. Deontay and Bullard would make a game of identifying different clip art objects starting with the chosen letter. They would draw the letter together and incorporate the clip art into Deontay's work. This helped prepare Deontay to enroll in the hospital school program this fall. Deontay has blossomed in the 11 months since she first began art therapy. She uses computers to create artwork and to do schoolwork, too. Instead of needing people to come to her, she drives her

wheelchair to them. She goes to see her hospital teacher, Julia Chaffin, and sometimes visits Bullard. She even participated in the Pediatric Surgical Center ribbon-cutting ceremony.

“You see in her eyes the light and sparkle of a child. She’s a kid again,” said Mullins.

Among Deontay’s many talents, creating artwork remains her passion. “You can’t walk into her room with a piece of paper in your hand without having Deontay say, ‘I want to draw. Get a marker,’” said Glenn.

“She’s good. Aren’t you Miss Deontay?” asked Bullard.

“Yep,” replied Deontay.