Many of Brittney Ferguson's friends haven't been able to visit as often as they would like, myself included. One advantage, though, of our rare visits is a different view of the recovery process.

Connie, Brittney's mom, has often commented on how slow her daughter's progress seems, but from the outside looking in, it's another story.

In the weeks separating my visits, Brittney has made huge improvement. The first time I saw her in mid November, she was barely moving, except to turn and look at whoever was talking. Now she seems like a different person completely. She's pointing and grabbing and taking things apart. She moves her arms and her legs, and has apparently been so active that she's been moved to a new bed to accommodate her progress.

Last week's visit also held a surprise in therapy. The Brittney who was hardly aware is long gone, and she's replaced by a much more typical 19-year-old: one who loves computer games.

Part of Brittney's occupational therapy involves playing computer games to help with focus, coordination and muscle control. What was most striking to me was the similarities between her therapy games and the games I play regularly online.

Speech therapy was another place where Brittney's improvement is unmistakable. While she can't speak yet, she is being taught to use what she has to communicate. Here she matches words, objects and pictures, showing us she does understand.

Outside her therapy, I saw Brittney using what she had learned when she pointed to choose between a tissue and chapstick.

After this last visit, Brittney's days don't seem that different from any other teenager's life: go to class, play computer, try to communicate with people who don't always understand you, repeat. She even got a massage and a manicure last week.

Activities like these are only part of the many things Craig Hospital has to offer its patients. While there, I saw patients going out for bike rides. Amanda showed us where her sister and others paint and do other crafts. There is a pool table and foosball, a garden and therapy dogs and many other things that are all part of the activities offered.

Along with the facility is another thing that is incredible to a visitor like me: the staff. Working with them every day, the Ferguson family has probably become accustomed to them, but I'm still in awe at how friendly, energetic and encouraging everyone is.

Therapists happily explain exercises and procedures to friends and family so we understand what Brittney's doing. When we went for a walk around the hospital, people were greeting us left and right, addressing Brittney by name and asking how she was doing.

One therapist in particular was especially friendly, talking with Brittney about life and boys and activities she had planned for the week. Her smile was genuine, and she was really fun to be around.

Future plans for Brittney involve a move to the other side of the hospital, where she will be less dependent on the staff, and more dependent on her family. Someone in the family will be with her 24 hours a day to care for her. This is considered preparation for the day the Fergusons will take Brittney home.

Looking in as Connie discussed the move with the therapists, it's clear she is a little nervous about the transition. I must say, though, that one more thing that being a visitor has made obvious is the Ferguson family's ability to take care of Brittney and help her along in her recovery.

I witnessed the family working together to move Brittney from her bed to her wheelchair. They troubleshoot together when Brittney seems uncomfortable, and assist in therapy and everyday

tasks. Spending the day with the Fergusons, I saw a family joined together, ready for the changes Brittney and her family will be facing.

Jes-c Brandt was an HHS classmate of Brittney Ferguson, graduating in 2007.