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MCC student reflects on how her calling in life -- providing therapy to children with autism -- came to be

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Posted: Wednesday, November 20, 2013 2:43 pm | Updated: 2:47 pm, Wed Nov 20, 2013.

By Brandon Smith, Special to Tribune

While attending Prescott Valley High School in 2009, Miranda Hays was in search of a topic for a research paper on developmental disabilities. The week of the assignment, Hays' six-year-old cousin was diagnosed with autism and her research topic suddenly became clear.

Once Hays understood her cousin's diagnosis, she was able to make a connection with him and decided then that providing therapy to children with autism was her calling in life.

Today, Hays works as a habilitation therapist for Arizona Autism United, a nonprofit organization located in Phoenix and spends time with families with autistic children to provide one-on-one in-home behavioral and therapeutic interventions.

"As a habilitation therapist, Miranda (Hays) teaches her kids how to speak, how to play and take care of themselves," Executive Director of AZA United, Aaron Blocher-Rubin said.

Hays spends over 30 hours a week giving individual care to children with autism helping them

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for children with autism.

Hays feels a special connection with every child she works with and takes great pride in herself and her abilities to help her kids every time they overcome obstacles.

"She loves her kids like they were members of her own family," Hays' boyfriend Dominick DiFurio said, "she always shares with me when she's made a breakthrough."

Hays is also a full time student at Mesa Community College After, and after completing her associate of science degree, she hopes to attend the University of Southern California and become a full time occupational therapist.

Hays admitted that spending so much time at school and work can be challenging.

But Hays tries not to let the stress of every day life affect her ability to connect with her kids. She sees time spent with the children as an escape rather than her job.

"Its an escape to have them in my life...I'll go see one of my five-year-olds who just had one of his

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best days in kindergarten,” she said, adding that she will often try and analyze her situation from the perspective of a five-year-old. “I’m like ‘whoa that’s really cool! Forget that I failed my math test, it’s OK because we’re going to go paint this dinosaur right now and it’s fun!’”

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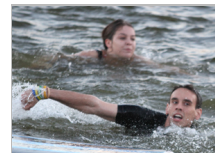
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