

## **THE AU PAIR EXCHANGE PROGRAM BROCHURE**

Thousands of American families and foreign nationals have participated in the Au Pair Program. Most have found it to be a rewarding experience, but it is important to fully understand the program before deciding to participate. This brochure explains the program and answers some frequently asked questions.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Au Pair Exchange Program was established in 1986 as an educational and cultural exchange program with a strong child care component. Program participants enter the United States for 12 months to care for children of the American family in whose home they live. At the same time, au pairs are required to complete an educational component of six semester hours of academic credit or its equivalent. At the end of one year, au pairs return to their home country.

“Au pair” is French for “on par,” reminding host families that, although an employee, their international visitor is to be treated like a member of the family. The rules are clear: au pairs are provided a private bedroom, meals, remuneration tied to the minimum wage, one and one-half days off weekly plus a full weekend off each month, two weeks’ paid vacation, and \$500 toward the cost of required course work to be completed at an accredited U.S. institution of higher education in order to satisfy the requirements of the educational component of the program. Au Pairs are responsible for the host families’ child(ren) entrusted to their care.

Au pairs are not to work more than 10 hours a day/45 hours a week. They are not to serve as general housekeepers or assume responsibility for household management.

In August 2001 the regulations governing the Au Pair Program were amended to create a sub-category called EduCare. This component is specifically designed for families with school-aged children requiring limited childcare assistance. Au pairs participating in the EduCare component may not be placed with families having pre-school aged children unless alternative arrangements are in place for these children.

EduCare participants are not to work more than 10 hours a day/30 hours a week. They must complete a minimum of 12 semester hours of academic credit, or its equivalent, during their program. Host families provide the first \$1,000 to the au pair toward the cost of the educational component. All au pair participants are paid in accordance with the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. As a matter of administrative convenience for both the Department-designated sponsors and participating host families, EduCare participants receive 75 percent of the predetermined weekly wage that is required for au pair participants.

If these requirements cause you any concern, you may wish to reconsider participating in the Au Pair Program. There are other considerations as well. When occasional problems arise, one mistake that host families and au pairs often make is to hope that conditions will improve and problems will correct themselves. It is important, however, to fully understand the program and conduct the necessary due diligence before deciding to participate. Host families and au pairs must communicate their expectations at the very beginning. As you consider whether the Au Pair Program is right for you, host families should think about how they will adjust to having

an international visitor in their home. Au pairs should think about how they will adjust to living with a new family in a different country. For each, the values and cultural perspectives of the other may be vastly different. The following questions and answers might help you to make that decision.

## **OVERVIEW**

### ***The Au Pair Program***

The Au Pair Program is an educational and cultural exchange program with a child care component. Au pairs come to the United States for one year to provide not more than 10 hours per day or more than 45 hours per week of child care for their host family while pursuing educational credits. The EduCare participant is not to provide more than 10 hours per day or more than 30 hours per week of child care while pursuing educational credit.

Sponsoring organizations in the U.S. have the responsibility for administering the program, within the regulations set by the Department of State. Although the Department designates organizations to conduct au pair programs, the responsibility for choosing the right organization rests solely with the host family and the au pair.

### ***Role and Responsibilities of the Sponsoring Organizations***

The Department of State designates bona fide organizations who have demonstrated the ability to satisfy the objectives set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations 22 CFR § 62 including section 62.31. Designated sponsor organizations carry out the day-to-day operation of their Au Pair Programs. They identify, screen, select, and match au pairs and host families. They ensure background investigations (including criminal history checks) are performed on au pairs, psychometric tests designed to assess the au pairs' character traits are conducted, and the financial resources of potential host families are assessed to ensure their ability to participate in the program.

Sponsoring organizations interview au pairs for spoken English proficiency and suitability to participate in the program. They also interview potential host parents to ensure spoken English fluency and suitability to host an international visitor.

Sponsoring organizations provide au pairs with a copy of all operating procedures, rules, and regulations, including a grievance process, which govern the au pair's participation in the exchange program; a detailed profile of the host family and community into which they will be placed; a detailed profile of the educational institutions available in the community where the au pair will be placed, including the financial cost of attendance; a detailed summary of travel arrangements; and a copy of the Department of State's written statement and brochure on the program.

Sponsoring organizations ensure that au pairs have all the child care training required by the Department prior to placement in the host family home. They monitor the au pair/host

family relationship throughout the au pairs stay in the United States through mandated monthly contact by local and/or regional counselors to ensure compliance with the regulations.

### ***Role and Responsibilities of Local and Regional Counselors***

Local and regional counselors maintain ongoing contact with, and support, au pairs and host families. Local counselors are required to have monthly personal contact with the au pairs and host families for whom they are responsible and must maintain a record of these monthly contacts. They must report to the sponsoring organization any unusual or serious situations or incidents involving au pairs and/or host families. Any incidents involving or alleging a crime of moral turpitude or violence are immediately to be relayed by the sponsoring organization to the Department. Moral turpitude is defined to include, but is not limited to, acts of theft, sexual misconduct, and child abuse.

### ***Role of the Department of State***

The Department of State oversees the sponsoring organizations and ensures compliance with the regulations governing the Au Pair Program. Sponsoring organizations must annually submit to the Department copies of their advertisement and recruitment materials. The Department annually reviews a sponsor organization's summary of the annual survey they conduct of host families and au pairs, all complaints received and their resolutions, and all situations that result in the placement of an au pair with more than one host family. Sponsoring organizations are audited annually to ensure compliance with the procedures and reporting requirements set forth in the Department's regulations.

### ***Costs of the Au Pair Program***

The average annual cost to an American host family is about \$17,000. This includes fees to the sponsoring organization (may vary from sponsor to sponsor), a weekly payment to the au pair tied to the minimum wage, an educational allowance of \$500, and room/board. EduCare participants also receive a weekly payment tied to minimum wage and an educational allowance of \$1,000.

### ***Mandatory "Educational Component" of the Au Pair Program***

Au pairs are required to enroll and attend a U.S. accredited post-secondary academic institution for not less than six semester hours of academic credit or its equivalent. Its equivalent would include the generally accepted number of trimester or quarter hours. The EduCare participant is required to enroll and attend a U.S. accredited post-secondary institution for not less than twelve semester hours of academic credit or its equivalent. Accredited two-year community colleges are eligible institutions.

### ***Role and Responsibilities of the American Host Family in Compliance with the Mandatory "Educational Component"***

In order for an American family to host an exchange visitor under the Au Pair Program they must agree to (1) facilitate the enrollment and attendance of the au pair in a U.S. "post-

secondary” educational institution; (2) ensure that the au pair has adequate transportation to attend; and (3) pay up to \$500 (\$1,000 for EduCare participants) toward the cost of required academic course work. Any additional costs associated with acquiring the required six academic credits (twelve for the EduCare participant) are to be absorbed by the au pair.

## **SCREENING AND SELECTION PROCESS**

### ***Au Pairs Ages and Countries of Origin***

Au pairs must be between the ages of 18 and 26 years upon the start of their exchange program.. They can be from any foreign country except those with which the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations.

### ***Required Training and Experience of Prospective Au pairs***

Au pairs must be proficient in spoken English and have a high school diploma or its equivalent. ***Host parents must interview a prospective au pair by telephone (before the au pair departs for the United States) prior to accepting them as an au pair candidate. .***

Before being placed with a host family, au pairs must receive at least eight hours of child safety and 24 hours of child development instruction. At least four hours of the child safety training must be infant-related and at least four hours of the child development instruction must be devoted to the care of children under two years of age.

The child safety training, provided by qualified organizations, includes topics such as stress management, shaken baby syndrome, and CPR. Au pairs responsible for children under two years of age must have at least 200 hours of documented infant child care experience. ***Au pairs may not be placed with a family having a child less than three months of age unless a parent or other responsible adult is present in the home.***

Au pairs will **NOT** have specialized training in nursing. They are **NOT** to provide child care services relating to the care and protection of infants and children performed by such trained personnel, as registered or practical nurses.

## **AU PAIRS IN THE HOST FAMILY HOMES**

### ***Au pairs Are Entitled To***

Au pairs are entitled to a private bedroom, meals, a weekly wage that will increase if the minimum wage increases, one and one-half days off each week, a full weekend off each month, two weeks of paid vacation, and the first \$500 (\$1,000 for EduCare participants) toward the cost of required academic course work.

### ***Host Families Are Entitled To***

Host families are entitled to a maximum of 10 hours a day or 45 hours a week (10 hours a day or 30 hours a week for EduCare participants) of child care, and they have the benefit of someone from another culture living in their home.

### ***Responsibilities of Au Pairs and Host Families vis-à-vis Program***

Either a parent or responsible adult must be present in the home for the first three days that the au pair is with the host family, which may include a weekend. The host family and au pair must attend at least one of their sponsoring organization's family day events during the au pair's stay.

There must be a signed written agreement between the host family and the au pair outlining the obligations of both parties. In addition, the sponsoring organizations generally require the host family and the au pair to sign written agreements that outline the obligations of each party to the organization.

### ***Duration of the Au Pair Program and Extensions***

Au pairs may stay with their host families in the U.S. for one year. An extension of an au pair's exchange program is possible if they are in good standing within the program and the Sponsor recommends a program extension on behalf of an au pair. To obtain a program extension, the Sponsor organization must submit a request to the Department of State for approval. Sponsors may request a six, nine or 12 month program extension on behalf of an au pair. The request must, without exception, be received no less than 30 calendar days prior to the expiration of the au pair's initial authorized period of stay (The program end date reflected on the Form DS-2019). The approval of a program extension is at the sole discretion of the Department of State.

## **QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

***What if I have questions after the initial selection and match have been made, or what if a problem arises?***

All Au Pair sponsor organizations have local and regional representatives who are available to help and counsel one or both parties of an Au Pair Program match. You can contact them or the sponsoring organization through which you entered the program.

The Department's Office of Designation staff is available to answer questions at (202) 632-2805. A listing of designated sponsors and related information can be obtained from the Department's web site <http://J1visa.state.gov>.

***What are my options if I am not happy with the arrangement?***

Both the host family and the au pair have options if they are not happy with the au pair arrangement. Since the terms of these options are contractual in nature and may vary from one

sponsoring organization to another, it is suggested that you check your contract with the sponsoring organization for specific information on cancellation conditions or talk with your sponsoring organization directly.

***Please Read Your Contract For Time Limits And Conditions***

*Please Note: No guarantee of performance or competency is made by the designation of sponsor organizations.*

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