

## **Aneta – the girl who wouldn't open the door!**

As I write this, I hear squeals of excitement from my children as Aneta chases them round the house for hide-and-seek. Aneta has just returned from her Christmas break, and we are all delighted to have her back!

When I read the letters of girls applying through the agency, as soon as I saw Aneta's application, I wanted to meet her. On paper she looked like the perfect match for our family – I was sure that we would all make each other happy! She said that she loved creative play (perfect for our imaginative 4-year-old), she loved cycling (our main transport), she showed true compassion for others (important as we are a fostering family) and loved singing (my husband is a professional musician, and we love doing "concerts" with our children singing for us). Most of all, she showed in her letter a spirit of feeling grateful – a feeling that undoubtedly defines us a family, appreciating all the amazing things we have in our lives.

It was love at first sight – we met her the next day on Skype, and before we knew it we were on the way to pick her up from the airport. Earlier than we originally planned, as when I said – "your room will be painted by the end of October so you can come after that", she said – "I can help you do it!" Just one example of her enthusiastic and pro-active spirit.

Aneta was excited to be in England but so nervous that she wouldn't even answer the door because she was afraid to speak English to strangers. We had to coax her to go into town by herself to open a bank account – she would have happily stayed at home with us for months on end without going out. She was quiet, but I knew that inside was a bubbly sociable intelligent girl desperate to be able to communicate with us as easily as in her native tongue.

Within weeks her English was flowing, and we could talk about anything with ease. Fast forward 2 months, and Aneta was answering the door(!) going out to the cinema with new friends she had met at a children's playgroup, and negotiating travelling across London by train to get to Dorset. She spends many hours a week on Skype to her boyfriend and family who she misses very much, but she never shows her homesickness and is always smiling when she is with us. She has taken huge steps to face unknown situations and her confidence has grown immeasurably in a few short months.

But of course what we most hoped for was that the children would love Aneta's company. And our very high hopes were not disappointed. It was my son's complaints about going to the childminder that led me to consider an au pair. In contrast to "I don't want to go Janet's", within a few days, we were hearing "I want to play with Aneta, why hasn't she woken up yet?!"

I am sure there are thousands of Au Pairs across the country doing a wonderful job, but there is one thing that has really marked Aneta out. My brother-in-law lost his wife last year to cancer, and after a relentless year of juggling the demands of work, the household and two energetic children under 5, he was

exhausted. Aneta had met and liked the children, and was happy to go and visit – getting the chance to see a very different part of the UK (rural Dorset compared with urban Bedford) and most important – to give help where needed. So natural is her rapport with children, she is instantly loved, and by the third day the children went straight to her room to wake her up. Aneta stayed for 10 days, gave the children a fantastic time and even found time to re-organise the kitchen, for which he was hugely grateful. Despite the help of family and friends throughout the year, he said “it was the most normal week of the year - I've ended another weekend feeling very different from any I spend on my own with the kids; I spent some nice time with them, I slept in, I got some things done and got out to the pub for a pint. It's great having someone around who's so good with the kids, so willing to help, and who's not a guest in the normal sense, so doesn't need entertaining.”

This is a huge credit to her because it demonstrates Aneta's very caring nature, her brilliant way with children, and the way she is embracing the opportunities represented by the au pair experience, eagerly soaking up new cultural experiences. In the next few weeks, we will have another foster child with us, and Aneta is as committed as we are to give a disadvantaged child a secure and happy home, and is obviously happy to contribute to this important job. To say we are very very happy to have Aneta as part of our family for this year does not go nearly far enough!