

Monday, January 26, 2015

Re: Nomination for Au Pair of the Year

Dear Sir or Madam,

We would like to put forward Maja Grutner for the award of Au Pair of the Year.

Maja joined us in December 2013. This was a difficult time for us as a family, our son had been having behavioral challenges and we were in the midst of trying to establish a diagnosis, deal with him only attending school part time and support our daughter who was in her final year of primary school, studying for her 11+ and senior school entrance exams.

Both of us as parents work full time and we had just had our Au Pair of three years leave, which was exacerbating our sons' challenges, as he was very attached to her.

We were clear when interviewing applicants about the situation and Maja impressed us immediately with her attitude towards the challenge. She was not fazed by the potential difficulties and was extremely enthusiastic about the position.

When Maja joined our family, she immediately continued the impression she had given us during the interview process. She was calm, polite, charming and immediately started to build a relationship with the children from the very first day. She was extremely proactive and always wanted to do everything she could to help out.

As time progressed, she truly became part of the family. She was always willing to engage with the children and spend time with them. She became their friend extremely quickly, but was still able to maintain the authority to discipline them and maintain control when we were not present. Her flexibility in approach and willingness to accommodate changes in both requirements and hours allowed us to allocate the time we needed to invest in working on our son's diagnosis and our work commitments.

On top of this, Maja was able to establish a very strong circle of friends within our local area, with both other Au Pairs and people she met at college. She was always willing to try new things and wanted to ensure that her time in the UK

was filled with new experiences. Her strength of character and determination often shone through and a great example of this was when her and a couple of her friends she had made in the UK travelled to London to visit the famous Pineapple Dance Studios. The girls had all heard of the company and travelled up to take a class. Upon getting there, the other girls got cold feet with the presence of the people they had seen on the successful UK TV show being present. Not Maja, she went ahead and took a class, fulfilling a goal she had set herself, even without the support of her friends.

She also strived to bring some of her Swedish culture into our lives. So often it is easy for an Au Pair to just focus on absorbing as much of the UK side into their lives, improving their English and experiencing the culture, but Maja made a real effort to help the children and us understand about the Swedish way of life. She made the family traditional Swedish meals and taught the kids how to make them. She introduced the children to traditional Swedish tales and found English translations of Swedish authors so they could experience the books she had grown up with. Maja also introduced us to a Swedish Christmas, bringing traditional Swedish treats and customs to our family, which was all the more impressive given that at that time she had only been with us for a month.

There were definitely challenging times for Maja as well. Our son's difficulties meant that he had the potential to shout and scream, throwing extremely severe tantrums. In the early stages, Maja found this difficult, but she refused to let this get her down and at every point was calming and controlled with him, never getting upset or angry in front of him and so helping him deal with situations by example. It is testament to Maja's influence that he has progressed enormously in dealing with his challenges and his growing ability to be calmer and more controlled himself.

We feel that although Maja was only with us for 7 months, she had such an impact on us as a family and achieved so much for herself in the time she was here, that she deserves the nomination for Au Pair of the Year.

Yours sincerely

Claudine & Simon Harris