

## *Every family has a story...welcome to ours.*

We are not an easy family.

We are not a family with adorable young children; with days filled playing in the park, snuggling on the couch, and doing arts and crafts. We are a two-teenager family. A two-teenager family with special needs.

Our 16 year old son is autistic and has an intellectual disability and our 12 year old daughter struggles with anxiety, ADHD, and other emotional challenges. They are absolutely fantastic humans who live and love passionately...but we are not always easy. When we decided to join the Au Pair program, we knew that it would take an incredibly special person to embrace our level of chaos and to be a part of our story. And like every new chapter we've written in this life, we knew we would have to do our research, ask lots of questions, share very honest things about ourselves, and then ultimately take the leap and follow our hearts.

Ingrid and Cara interviewed each other the first time via a video call in June 2021 where Cara spoke way too fast and they each probably understood about half of the conversation. But there was a connection that cannot be explained. We spent more time getting to know each other via text (to take advantage of google translate) and then another call where Ingrid was able to meet Rich and the kids (she observed them arguing - gasp!). Still, when we asked her to match with us, she also took a leap of faith and accepted our offer to join our crazy family in August 2021. And though the first year was filled with both big wins and big challenges, we were thrilled she extended with us for another.

From the moment she arrived, Ingrid has embraced the true spirit of Au Pair life, balancing cultural and family experiences. She quickly got out of her comfort zone to ensure she has been able to take full advantage of this time in her life. She's made many friends (both in her cluster and in the community), traveled to Mexico (with us), NYC, Miami, Puerto Rico, Disney World (a solo trip where she met a great group of Australians), Maryland beaches, our local towns and of course Washington DC and all it has to offer. She experienced her first snowfall (one of our personal all-time favorite moments), hikes in the mountains and kayaking on the lake - sometimes with friends and sometimes with the kids. She has experienced Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas festivities, Fourth of Julys...and if our love for Halloween didn't scare her away, nothing will! She often joins us for short trips and to visit with grandparents and extended family and friends, and they love her as their own, the same as us.

She's attended school meetings to learn more about our kid's needs, driven them to sports and therapy sessions, volunteered in their classrooms and on field trips and plans one on one activities with each of them. She is a role model for both of them in different ways. For our son, she is someone who "gets" him. They play video games, jump on the trampoline together, learn new dance moves and practice life skills in a way that parents cannot. For our daughter she is a strong, independent woman, who talks about her feelings and shares her experiences and

lessons of life. She is an older sister who can listen and help her with her problems in a way that parents don't always understand. She loves them unconditionally.

There are simply so many things to love about Ingrid. As an Au Pair and roommate, she is incredibly independent, responsible, knows how to balance fun and discipline, takes initiative and is one of the best communicators I know (even in the beginning with the language barrier and with a 16 year old with speech difficulties). As a person and friend and "daughter", she is passionate, caring, funny, unexpectedly sarcastic, outgoing and lives and loves deeply. She has taught us about Brazil and her family and her hopes and dreams. She includes us in gatherings with her new friends here and in video calls with her family at home.

It has been an honor watching Ingrid grow as a person over the last 16 months. She has been our calm in the storm, a true partner in raising teenagers, and she brings an energy to our home that we did not know we needed and cannot imagine living without. She will always be a part of our story.