

Josefine Schlaak

Josefine (“Jo”) has been with our family since August 2014 and we have been incredibly impressed with her. Since we have hosted prior au pairs, we are familiar with the quality and characteristics we can find in an au pair. We have previously had positive experiences but none as extraordinary as our current experience with Jo.

Jo is the most caring, giving au pair we can imagine. She deeply cares about our two boys including our older son Max who has special needs. She has already volunteered several times in both of our sons’ classrooms (Nathan, Kindergarten and Max, 2nd grade) without our prompting and has created a fantastic link between home and school. One of the volunteering experiences at Max’s classroom was a daily project for a full week that culminated in a play. Jo was leading Max’s group and they performed their play beautifully at the end of this week. This may sound like a simple accomplishment but we’d like to highlight that our son has difficulties with unstructured situations and with performance anxiety and in his prior school year, he was unable to meaningfully participate in such activities. Jo’s presence enabled him to join his peers in this activity, which significantly impacted his socialization and helped him realize his full potential. Through many school interactions like these, she won the affection of the school staff and our children’s teachers and has become an integral part in both Max’s and Nathan’s classroom. This experience has also shaped her future outlook and she is now interested to follow up her au pair year with studies in education.

In addition to volunteering in Max’s classroom, Jo has been helping with Nathan’s soccer team. She recognized that they are often short one coach during practices and that practice is much more fun and productive with an additional coach. Therefore, she wears her own soccer gear at every practice (even though she is more of a dancer than a soccer player!) and participates as a second coach. This of course caused Nathan extreme joy—to have his au pair coaching.

Jo truly enjoys spending time with children and even on the weekends on her time “off” she can be found jumping on the trampoline with the boys, dancing with them and sharing lots of laughs. Jo has a heartfelt enjoyment of the kids and this comes through during any interaction. Additionally Jo takes great pride in her work and in making the children happy. For example, she creates elaborate and meaningful decorations for the children’s snack bags every evening (see [photos](#)). She also regularly makes videos and photos of the children with high quality that we can enjoy for many years to come (see [video](#)).

In addition to volunteering her time, Jo has integrated herself into our family life in an extraordinary way. She joins us for nearly all meals and family activities. She is incredibly polite and respectful and simply a delight to be around. In addition she has found local friends in an independent fashion and even has an American friend, a local high school student, and has already attended several high school football games. She also has a Swedish friend she met at her TOEFL preparation course and they spend time together and exchange cultural experiences further. Jo also loves dancing and therefore researched local dance classes and independently found a class filled with Americans, which she attends on Wednesday evenings. This class connects her to others locally with a similar passion for dance. She has truly integrated herself into our society with ease.

Additionally our family is Jewish and Jo has had little exposure to the Jewish faith prior to her au pair year. We were astounded when Jo offered to bake a special dish with apples for the Jewish New Year and even more surprised when she asked to come with us to synagogue as well as to join us in the one-day fasting on the holiday of Yom Kippur. Although she has a strong identity and belief system, she has opened her heart and her mind to our culture and this is touching and gratifying for the entire family.

As host parents we rarely encounter an au pair who enriches our lives so significantly and whom we consider a family member immediately. Jo is a walking advertisement for the au pair program. When I speak about her to family and friends they are simply in disbelief. Please recognize Jo for her phenomenal work ethic, warmth, integrity, professionalism and intelligence. She is a shining example for all au pairs to follow.