

## Sonsoles Ribes

Our family would like to nominate Sonsoles Ribes for Au Pair of the Year! Sonsoles came to our family from Madrid, Spain—bravely joining our loud and boisterous family of 6 children aged 9 and under (including a set of twins and a newborn!). She came with an enormous smile and a seemingly endless supply of patience and energy. Two things were evident from day one—Sonsoles wanted to be as helpful to us as she possibly could and she was going to make sure this year was the adventure of a lifetime.

Within hours of her arrival, our town was buried with a massive snowstorm. Un-phased by the prospect of being homebound for days with 6 bored children, Sonsoles used this time to establish a lasting rapport with each child. She understood the importance of making each child feel respected and went out of her way to draw them out of their initial shyness and find common interests and hobbies. Whether it was a love of art, gymnastics, reading, or Taylor Swift—Sonsoles connected with each child, instinctively knowing how to lay the foundation for what would become an effective and loving relationship with our children.

Once the snow melted and real life set in, Sonsoles amazed us with her ability to multi-task. It is a truly exceptional person who can do laundry for 6 children, patiently help a struggling reader advance to the next level, supervise a crawling baby, all while preparing meals and refereeing disagreements. She managed to accomplish all these things with her ready sense of humor and a contagious smile.

One would think that someone who has accomplished so much each week would have no energy leftover to explore her new surroundings and make friends. On the contrary, Sonsoles embraced the unique opportunity available to her as an au pair and eagerly set out during her free time to explore as many US and Canadian cities as she could possibly fit in! She became a regular at our local church and YMCA—happily considering herself a member of each community. She carefully planned many day trips for her fellow au pairs to nearby towns and cultural events—even finding a local festival selling cheap plane rides for “aerial sightseeing”. We were amused to see her overcome her dislike of country music and join a group of fellow au pairs for a night of country line dancing. I knew she was fully immersing herself in American culture when she made a Sunday night tradition of it, even jokingly declaring that she needed to find herself a cowboy hat!

As our year with Sonsoles comes to an end, we have been reflecting on all the ways Sonsoles has impacted our family. For starters, we recognized that Sonsoles’ calm demeanor had seen our baby safely through a major crisis when she had her first (and hopefully only!) trip to the hospital emergency room. During that incident, Sonsoles was cool and collected with our infant who was having an allergic reaction to eggs. Rather than succumbing to her nerves, Sonsoles contacted me immediately with her concerns and texted me detailed photos of the worrisome rash. When I arrived home minutes later, I frantically called the doctor and assumed care of the baby. Yet Sonsoles knew the importance of establishing calm while I was preoccupied so she effectively entertained the other children while packing a hospital bag with supplies she thought the baby and I might need. Thankfully, our daughter was all right but I will always be grateful to Sonsoles for recognizing the subtle signs of distress in our child and for proactively helping to control the entire situation.

Another less dramatic, yet equally significant, example of how Sonsoles has impacted our family is the fact that during her year with us she has consistently sought to help us in both the ways that she was asked *and* the ways she saw we needed. Some instances include the times she would be asked to wash the laundry in the kids' hampers--but she would observe that items like their jackets or book bags could use some "freshening up"--and would pop them in the wash, too. Or she would be asked to make a child lunch but rather than using a standby favorite like chicken nuggets she would introduce the child to healthy options like hummus and pita...creatively using cookie cutters in fun shapes to make it appealing! Or the countless times she had already finished the evening's requested tasks but proceeded to assemble all the kids' lunches for the next day...just because she knew I was tired and busy but it still needed to be done.

For all of the above reasons...and the millions more there simply isn't space to write about...we happily present Sonsoles Ribes to you for consideration as 2014's Au Pair of the Year!

