

## Stella Henning

I was not convinced that an au pair would be a good fit for my family. However, our community counselor introduced us to Stella. She was as warm as anyone I have ever met, and we went full steam ahead. Friends advised us not to become close friends with our new au pair, but our relationship was different. I joked about getting in trouble being seen playing Frisbee, bike riding, or even running together. I am writing this not because I have a new friend, but because Stella has transformed our family.

What I never expected was to begin this journey. Stella has been a reminder of gratitude, a peak at the possibilities of fun. Stella laughs and it is contagious. She laughs at funny things, she laughs at the challenging things in life. It is the way I want my kids to experience the world. Life is hard and I always believe it is the way you respond to the ups and the downs that will dictate how easy you go through your journey, or how you experience life, through the prospect of happiness or struggle. We all have a choice and Stella seems to make the right one and that helps our family immeasurably.

I realize now that I am not sure just any au pair could walk into our home and find success. We are fly-by-the-seat-of-our-pants household due to a self-inflicted craziness of schedules and agendas. I know other families are more scheduled, but not us....until Stella arrived. She arrived and immediately helped my family gain control. She has taken initiatives that perhaps a 44 yr. old (yes that is me) may miss.

In other social groups, Stella has volunteered at any opportunity. She has never missed a cluster meeting and she has volunteered at the host family event by baking cupcakes and face painting. She has done the Walk for hunger 20 miles to raise contributions. She has been heavily involved with Global Awareness, coming into our elementary school and teaching the classrooms about South Africa. I have never seen anyone with Stella's maturity, commitment, passion, and hard work. She has helped with any new au pairs coming to town. She is the link to many friendships within the organization...

Stella's social skills are impeccable and we are all benefiting. Since Stella's arrival, it is clear that the kids have learned from her example. Having gratitude is also very important and I can read to my kids all day about it, but Stella has been gracious and grateful about everything, even her tiny little red bedroom (another reason why I never thought an au pair was appropriate for us). Stella says "it does not matter the size of the home, it is the size of the hearts within a home."

Stella has also taught us another language- Afrikaans. She has embraced every holiday from a haunted barn for Halloween to a Christmas decoration of grand scale. She has let us all find our happiness potential... Stella shows extreme passion in everything she does, including making our son, Ben, a homemade broken leg/cast cake which took her 5 hours of her free time. Stella has helped us with patience, reminding us all of the simple things.

Stella searches for connections with everyone she meets. She has integrated not only within our immediate family but also with my mom, dad, aunt and other relatives and friends. She is a pleasure to have around in any social situation and this is not something taught, but this innate ability to be lovely. Her style is one of love and inclusion for everyone. This is the best role model we could ask for!