



Au Pair in America Program Outcomes

A View from Our Alumni
1987–2012

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Introduction

As the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) approaches its 50-year anniversary in 2014, we asked alumni of the Au Pair in America program to reflect on their experience as an au pair and its impact on their lives.

Offered through the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the au pair program is one opportunity for international visitors looking to travel and gain experience in the United States. Au Pair in America (APIA) is a designated sponsor of the au pair program. This report describes outcomes of a survey we recently conducted of APIA alumni who participated in the program between 1987 and 2012. We wanted to gain a fuller picture of the long-term impact of their experience—on both a personal and professional level—living with American families, caring for their host's children, and taking classes in communities throughout the nation.

Since its inception in 1986 as the first au pair program in the United States, APIA has set a high standard for management of the program and our active engagement with both U.S. families and international au pairs. Au Pair in America has brought an estimated 90,000 young people, from more than 60 countries in Europe, South Africa, the Americas, New Zealand,

“This exchange experience has profoundly changed the lives of au pairs, the young children they care for, and their host families through their daily exchange of ideas and broadening their global understanding through a sharing of culture, language, and religion. Furthermore, au pairs have been active contributing members of their American community where they live through their engagement in community and religious activities, giving of their time and talents to charitable organizations, and volunteering their time to teach young children in schools about their native country.

“As a proud alumnus of one of AIFS’s study abroad programs, I can personally attest to the unique educational opportunity living outside your native country provides a young student. For me, it was a life changing experience, helping expand my horizons and alter my way of thinking.”

—Honorable Russ Carnahan
of Missouri in the House of
Representatives
June 3, 2011

the Middle East and Asia, into communities in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs reports that over 13,000 young people enter the U.S. each year to participate in the au pair program for up to two years.

AIFS has had an exceptional record of leadership and innovation in the international education community over the past fifty years and has actively supported the participation of women in all its programs. Nearly 300,000 women from more than 120 nations have experienced life in the United States through a variety of our sponsored programs, including APIA and, in addition, as high school exchange students, camp counselors, as participants in various other summer programs. Au pairs were among the first U.S. visitors from South Africa after the downfall of Apartheid and the ban on travel of its citizens was lifted. Currently, women from the nations of the Arab Spring are participating in our programs.

The program’s global outreach and presence in so many communities across the United States has generated a sustainable and ongoing wellspring of goodwill for over 25 years. The long-term involvement of au pairs with families throughout the U.S., coupled with the diversity of international families who have been engaged in the program, has created a unique global web of human relationships. As our survey demonstrates, APIA has had a deep impact on the family life of U.S. host families as well as participants’ families long after the au pairs have left the program and started their careers.

APIA produces a ripple effect in the lives of host family children – benefits that are sustainable into their adult years. In a 2009–2010 outcomes survey we conducted of children raised in families hosting au pairs, these benefits were evident on many levels, including: maintaining international friendships, cross-cultural communications, global awareness and foreign language comprehension. (The current survey shows impacts in these same areas for the au pairs themselves.) Remarkably, 95% of respondents said they remained in contact with their former au pair(s) – a testament to the deep interpersonal relationships that the program forges between au pairs and the children whom they live with and care for.

A unique feature of APIA is our long-standing effort to foster understanding of American society and community life through the Global Awareness Program. It brings expanded educational and cultural opportunities to the forefront for Au Pair in America participants and those in the communities where the au pairs reside. With ongoing opportunities not only to “meet our global neighbor,” but also to build “cross-cultural bridges,” the Global Awareness program encourages better understanding of other cultures, improves communication between cultures, and supports the concept of mutual acceptance. A key goal of the program is its emphasis on cultural diversity as a source of enrichment rather than a source of confusion and strife. Au pairs conduct presentations about their native country in schools (PK–6), libraries, and community organizations. They can support existing curriculum or present age-appropriate modules aimed at enhancing multicultural knowledge.

Executive Summary

The report explores the impacts of APIA and assesses its success in several areas: personal development, understanding of U.S. culture and society, career direction and employability, and global outlook. These four areas address the intent of the au pair program to provide individuals an opportunity to immerse themselves in daily life with an American family and engage with other Americans in the community, while at the same time gaining critical skills and competencies that measurably contribute to their personal and professional development.

A survey questionnaire was sent to a total of 26,000 individuals who participated in and completed the APIA program. We received an excellent response from over 6,200 program alumni. The alumni who responded to the survey participated in the program between 1987–2012, with 49% having participated in the past 5 years, 42% within the past 6–10 years, and 9% within the past 11–26 years.

Our findings demonstrate that participation in APIA has had a measurable and sustained impact in the key areas of personal development, understanding of U.S. culture and society, career direction and employability, and global outlook and local involvement (i.e., civic engagement).

"I just wanted to say thank you to Au Pair in America for our participation in Chicago in the years 1989 to 1993. My husband and I just returned from a trip to Germany where we visited with our two fabulous au pairs from those years, Ulrike Pauls and Sabine Braudel. We stayed in touch over the years and finally visited them and their young children. The association has enriched our family life so much over the years. Thanks again!"

—Mary Ann Fischer, Illinois
2013

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

By all measures, APIA alumni respondents indicated that their experience in the program measurably contributed to their personal development. They stated that the program has contributed to:

Better understanding of themselves and their values	95%
Self-confidence	95%
Ability to accept differences	90%
Being more flexible and open-minded	94%
Being more independent	95%
Taking initiative	91%
Desire for more diverse friendships and social networks	91%
Strengthening of relationships within their own family	75%
Friendships with people from other countries	94%
Willingness to work hard and do well in school and in the workplace	79%
Develop skills and talents	83%
Traveled alone or with friends around the country	75%

UNDERSTANDING U.S. CULTURE AND SOCIETY

A key objective of the cultural exchange programs is to provide the opportunity for international visitors to learn about U.S. culture and society. In accordance with the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, the au pair exchange program indeed builds mutual understanding and helps to create a foundation of trust between Americans and the rest of the world. Au pairs are able to gain insight on a more intimate level by living with an American family and engaging in daily activities in the home and community; by taking classes at a local college or university; through their travels to other cities; and, for some, to engage with the community by taking part in some form of volunteer work.

Of the survey respondents:

- 80% of alumni reported that since being an au pair, their attitude toward the United States and its people is more positive.
- 70% reported that living with an American family contributed to their general understanding of American culture.
- 71% of respondents stated they have maintained contact with their host family(ies) and consider them to be family.
- The opportunity afforded by the program to enroll and take classes at a college or university was reported by 76% of respondents to have helped them learn more about U.S. culture.
- 24% of respondents took part in some form of volunteer work or community service while they were in the U.S. Interestingly, anecdotal comments suggest many more engaged in community service after returning to their home country.

CAREER DIRECTION AND EMPLOYABILITY

While the U.S. economy has slowly recovered from the recession of past years, in many other nations, economic conditions and opportunities for employment have remained stagnant. Thus, the opportunity to gain skills and build personal qualities that enhance a young person's employability in her home country proved to be an important element in the success of APIA.

Globalization has witnessed the rising necessity for young workers around the world to speak English in the workplace and in doing business with international clients or colleagues. Thus, it is notable that 83% of respondents stated that their English language skills, strengthened as a

“The two years that I lived in America (2010–2012) changed my impressions about Americans and about their way of living. We all think that Americans are a little ‘selfish’ and that they are not friendly. I have to say it’s all wrong! I met amazing people, I lived with a family that I consider to be my second one, and their culture and habits grew on me. I love to say that U.S. is not only about fast food and shopping. I try to share with people what I learned about them after the time I spent there. I love their practical way of living, everything seems easy, they only waste time with things that matter. It’s amazing to see how strong and united they are. We have the Sandy Storm as an example of their union and strength. I miss my beautiful NY and Port Jefferson so badly. It was definitely one of the most amazing experiences I have had in my life—which I will never forget!”

—Patricia Minetto,
Brazil, 2010–2012

result of their work, travel, and community interaction, provided better job opportunities. Further, 80% reported they spoke English with friends, family, and in their workplace setting.

APIA was found to have had a significant influence in many important ways on the professional development of alumni. Respondents stated that the program strongly influenced:

Speaking English in the workplace	84%
Provided job opportunities that otherwise would not have been available	83%
Ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments	86%
Decision to work in a field they find interesting and fulfilling	72%
Direction of career choices	60%
Development of intercultural skills that impacted obtaining their first job after leaving the program	60%

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said that APIA was among the most influential professional experiences they have had in their life.

There has been a lot of recent research that confirms the importance employers place on the soft intercultural skills that APIA provides participants. This is likely why we see the importance of the personal and professional skill sets stressed in our survey outcomes. For example, there is new research on bilingualism explaining how speaking more than one language offers a broad array of benefits and advantages, according to Italian professor Antonella Sorace from the University of Edinburgh. According to a recent report in *The Financial Times*, her bilingualism research explains that, in addition to communication benefits, multilingualism often provides cognitive benefits, such as improved skills of intercultural sensitivity, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise. Sorace even claims that multilinguals can think more efficiently. These cognitive benefits, her research explains, come from a multilingual person's deeper understanding, from an early age, that someone from another culture might have a different perspective.

GLOBAL OUTLOOK/LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

Because APIA offers such a lengthy and in-depth cross-cultural experience in the United States, we would expect alumni to report outcomes indicating their program experience had influenced their outlook on both the U.S. and its role in the world community. Our findings did bear out the strong impact of the program on the global outlook of alumni in the following ways:

Development of friendships with people from other nations	94%
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Ability to communicate in my home country about U.S. citizens and culture in a more informed and positive manner	88%
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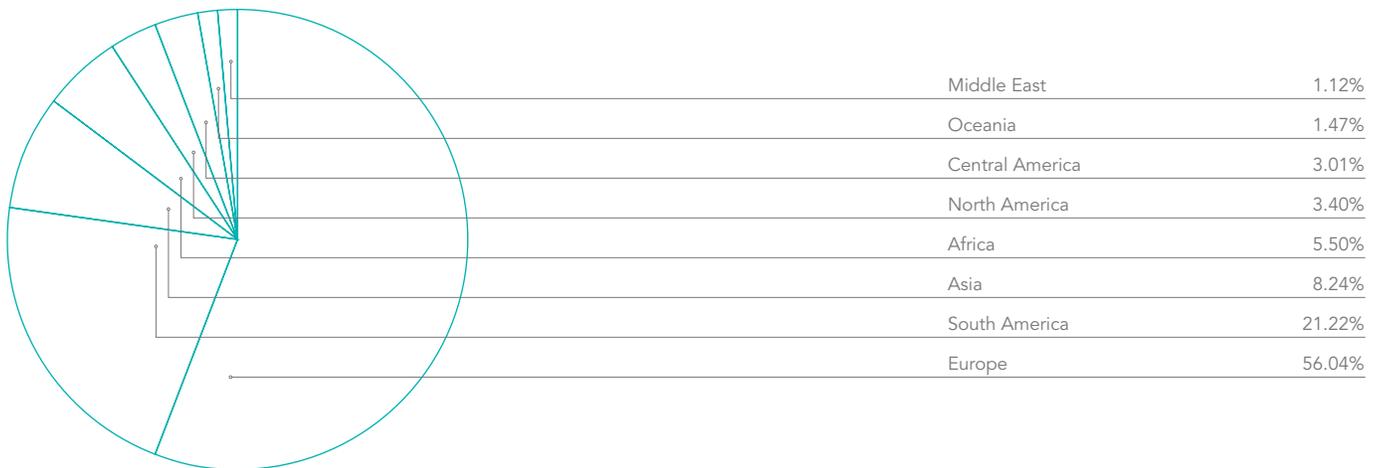
Developed my awareness of political, economic and social events around the world	68%
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More tolerant attitude toward the U.S. and its involvement in world affairs	65%
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Involvement and interest in a global issue	61%
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Survey Findings

Respondents by Country



Africa

Namibia
South Africa
Zimbabwe

Asia

China
India
Japan
Malaysia
Singapore
South Korea
Thailand

Central America

Costa Rica
Guatemala
Panama

Europe

Austria
Belgium
Bosnia
Bulgaria
Croatia
Czech Republic

Denmark

Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Lithuania

Luxembourg

Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden

Switzerland

Ukraine
United Kingdom

Middle East

Georgia
Israel
Macedonia
Turkey

North America

Canada
Mexico

Oceania

Australia
New Zealand

South America

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Ecuador
Peru
Venezuela

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

My participation as an au pair in the U.S. contributed to:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

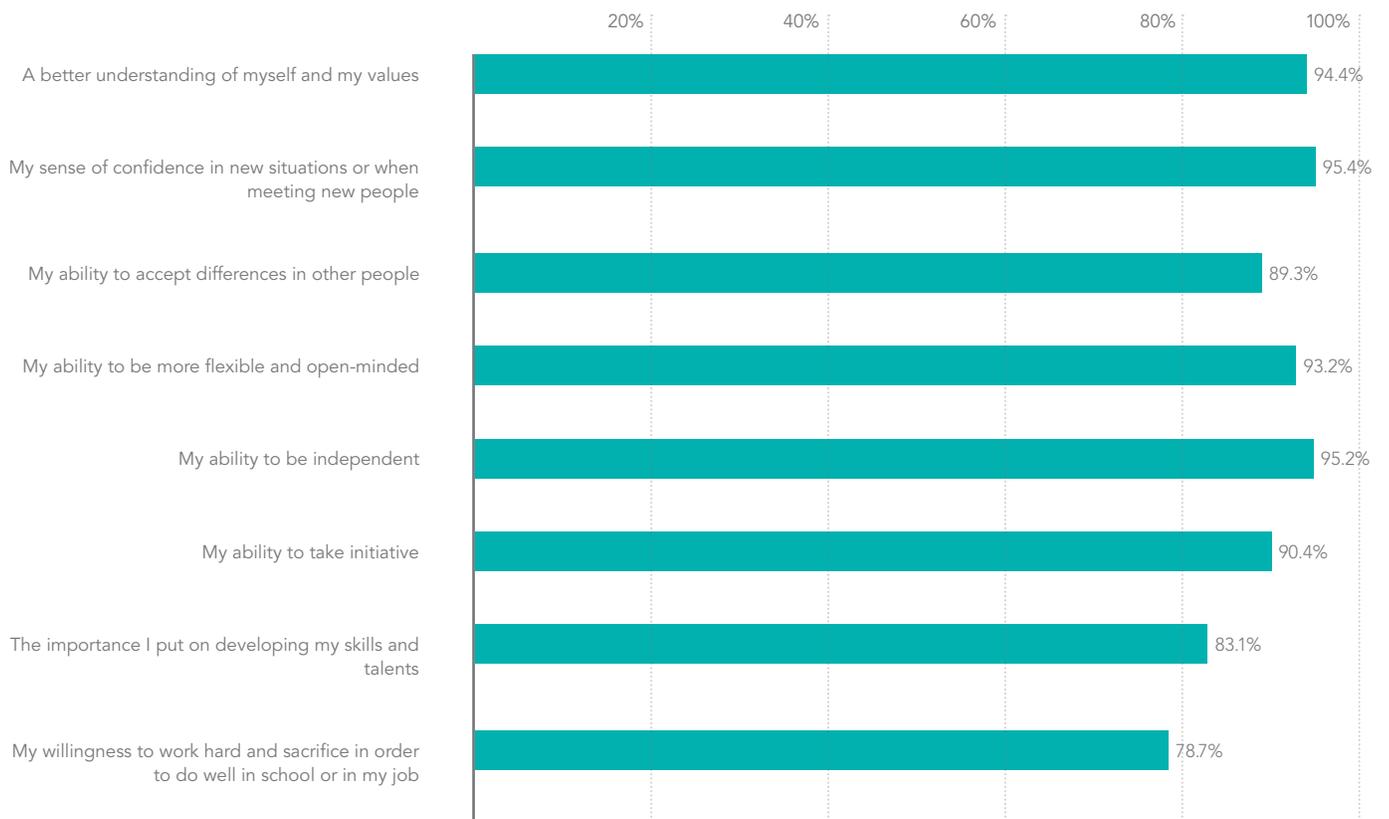
“In my case, it was the best decision I could ever have made. It changed my life completely. I made so many friends, from all over the world. The experience, and self-confidence I gained after this, made my life so much easier. After that year in the U.S., I decided to come back to my country and started University. After 10 years, I became a geologist. I have a great job and travel around the world....But I will never forget the experience that changed me completely. Deep inside, I will always be an au pair.”

—Cecilia Garcia, Argentina, 2003–2004

“It is a wonderful opportunity to grow emotionally and psychologically. It teaches a person to take responsibility and to be accepting of people different than yourself.”

—Naylene Enslin, South Africa, 2008–2009

My participation as an au pair in the U.S. contributed to:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

In the survey we invited alumni to comment on whether they would recommend the au pair experience to others. A sampling of responses illustrates how the program impacted the au pair's family relationships, expanded their network of friends globally, and increased their personal development.

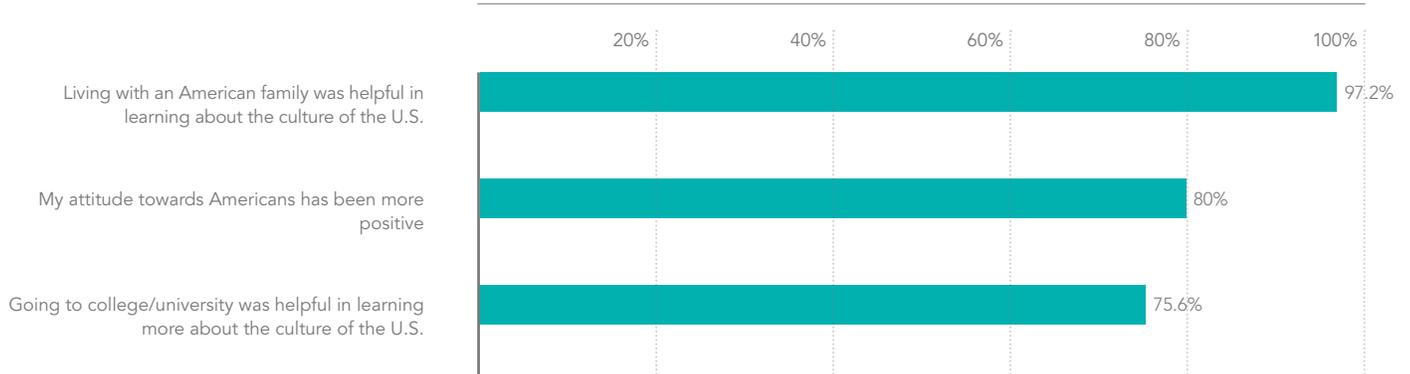
"Honestly, Au Pair in America changed my life completely. Coming to a different country and living with a host family is the best way to learn about the culture and the language. It made me stronger, independent, and more tolerant."

—Aroa Lopez Olmeda, Spain, 2006–2008

UNDERSTANDING U.S. CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The history of volunteerism in America goes back to the founding of the United States. We have long been a nation focused on helping and improving the lives of others. Twenty-four percent of respondents took part in some form of volunteer or community service. We know that for many, the volunteer or community service activity they engaged in while an au pair was their first, but not their last. Hundreds of respondents referenced volunteer activities they have been doing since completing their au pair experience.

Overall Experience – While I was an au pair in the USA:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

“Before I went to America, I was biased about American culture and the personality of American people. However, when I had the chance to experience American living, I saw that American people are very helpful (especially the ones I met) and very friendly.”

—Seda Nur Ekinci, Turkey, 2004–2006

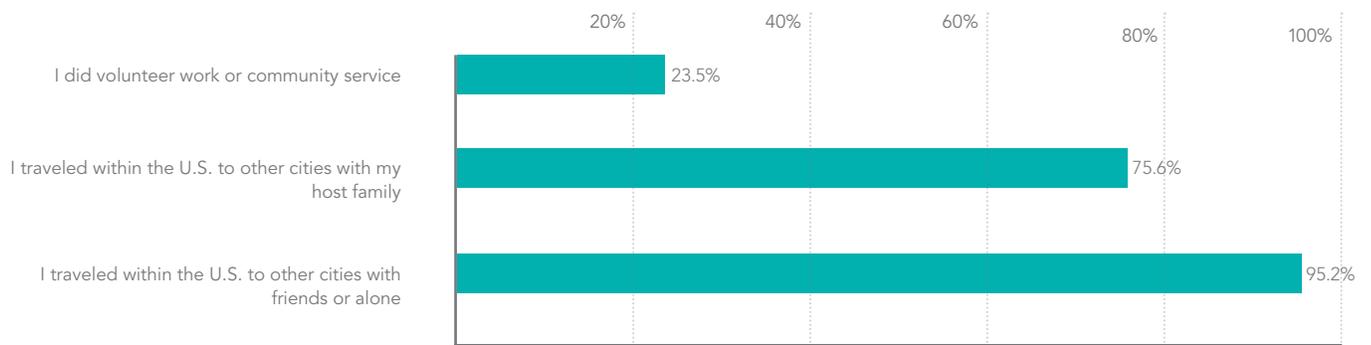
“In the States I realized how proud of America everyone is, how truly patriotic and how much their country means to me. It rocked me to the core to realize we do not have that same unity. I have come back and wanted to do something. I decided to re-join an organization where I volunteered long before I left for the States. I volunteer for The Pinkladies, a missing children’s organization.”

—Claudine Joubert, South Africa, 2008–2010

“Living with my American host family was being with my second family. I have now one family in Germany and one living in the U.S.”

—Marie Koark, Germany, 2008–2010

Volunteer / Travel – While I was an au pair in the U.S.:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

“While in the U.S., I took part in the Global Awareness program, which I found very fulfilling. I have been a volunteer in a conversational class, with a goal to improve the language (English) skills of non-native English speakers.”

—Jenny Calsson, Sweden 2005–2007

“Now I am working in a bilingual school for kids and my priority is education and always will be. My desire is to teach kids that don’t have the same opportunity as I had to learn English. I want to help children around the world volunteering as a teacher. I know it is a little thing but I truly believe they can move forward to a better world and have a better quality of life.”

—Lillian Sanches, Brazil, 2009–2011

“From meeting other au pairs from all over the world, I was inspired to travel more and participate with other organisations. I traveled around Africa and worked with various charities in South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi and Swaziland.”

—Rose-Marie Butt, United Kingdom, 2007–2008

“For a year and a half now I have been involved with Doctors of the World in a program working with the Romani people. It is focused on health. This year I have started to volunteer in an organization helping illegal immigrants with the administrative process.”

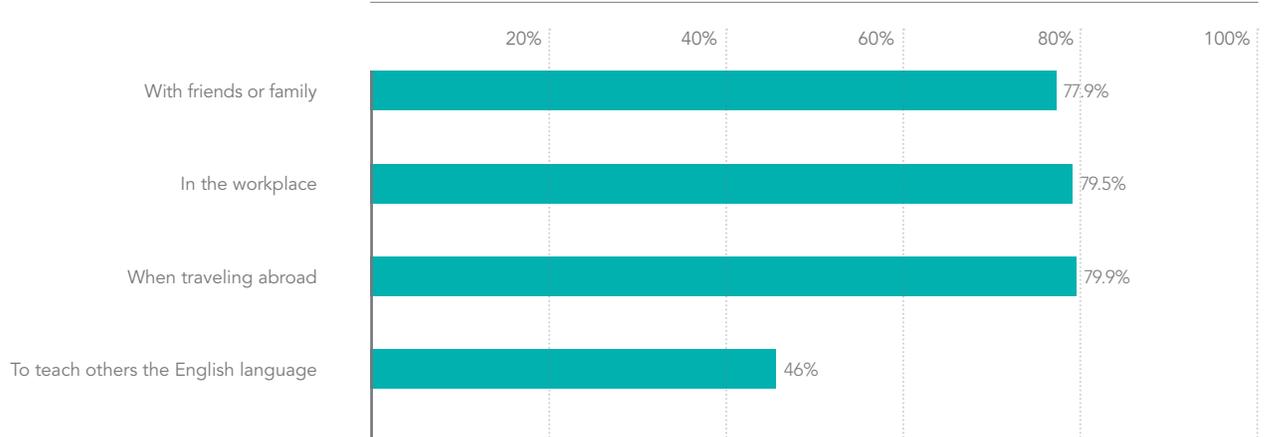
—Marie Guibreteau, France, 2005–2006

“I returned to the U.S. as an au pair in 2009. During this time, I started volunteering at a local adult learning center. I taught English to Spanish-speaking adults who had come to the U.S. and needed help speaking the language...and this prompted my decision to become an ESL teacher.”

—Chantal Smith, South Africa, 2006–2007

CAREER DIRECTION AND EMPLOYABILITY

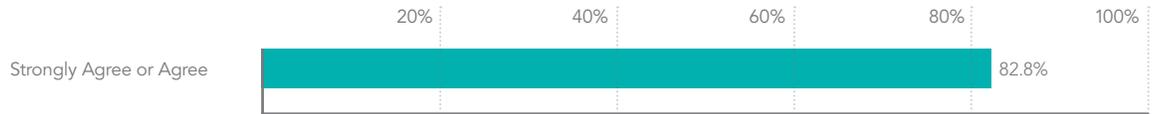
Since being an au pair, I have used my English skills:



“Being an au pair has changed my life. I’m currently residing in Minneapolis, MN. I manage finances for a law firm.”

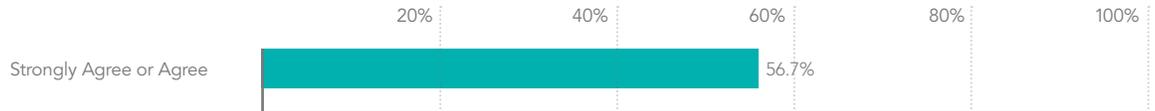
—Shiryn Tan Gold, Malaysia, 2006–2008

English skills I gained as an au pair provided better job opportunities



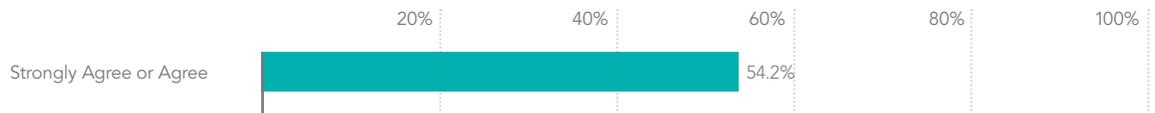
Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

My experience as an au pair impacted my decision to continue my formal education studies when I returned to my home country



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

My experience as an au pair influenced the direction of my educational studies

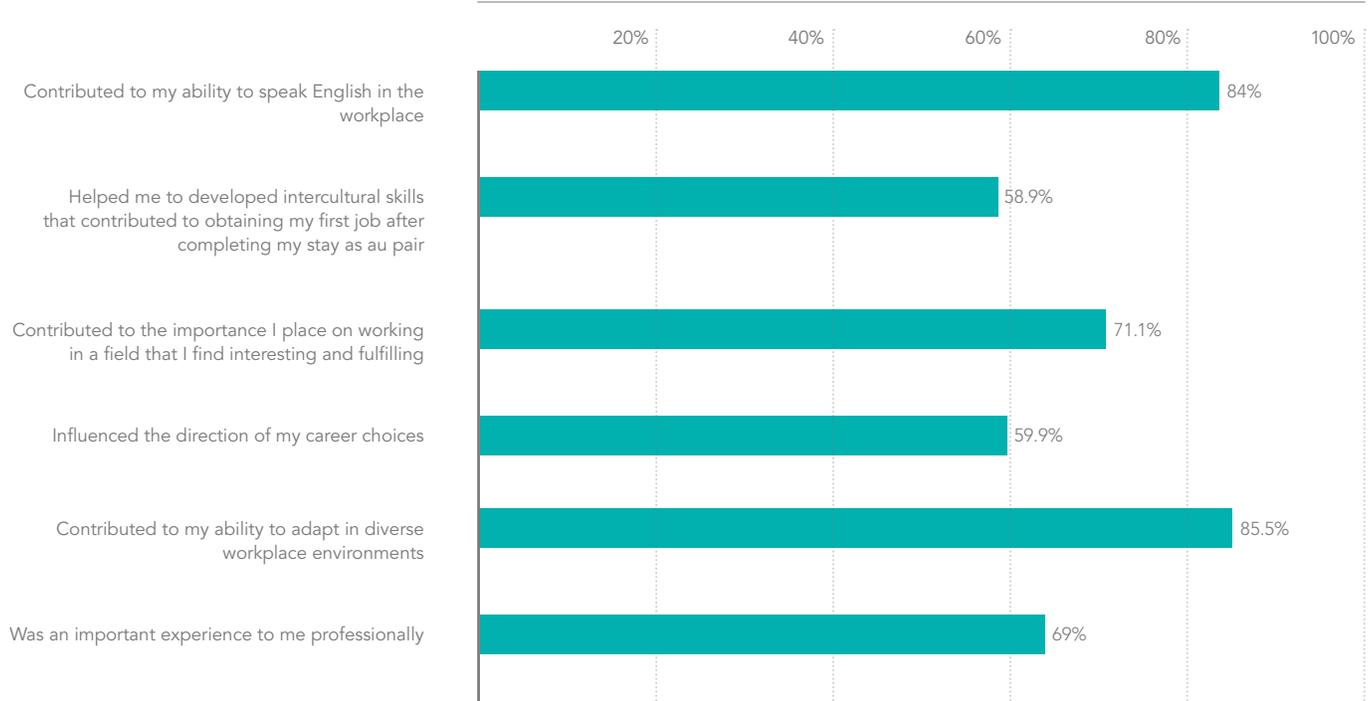


Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

“After my experience in Au Pair in America, I got a scholarship to one of the best universities in the world, and I finished my MBA. I came to my country, and now, I am a professor in the best university of Guatemala.”

—Erika Lopez, Guatemala, 2009–2010

My participation as an au pair in the U.S.:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

"Au Pair in America experience is strongly valuable, not only for people who are planning on working with children. Personally, I am an engineer now, but the experience I have gained during my stay in United States was very important in my workplace....I have been getting job offers without looking for them because of my fluency in English and I am getting a bigger salary than if I didn't have such an experience."

—Anna Maciag, Poland, 2007–2008

"I am studying to become a diplomat. I really loved the way Americans are engaged with politics and society, and humanitarian causes. I decided that I want to do it for life by being a diplomat....I lived in Washington, D.C., where I had contact with the 'capitol of the world.'"

"I learned a lot, not only English but the way of life....I lived with an awesome family, and I love the kids as if they are my kids! That's a life changing experience. It made me a better person!"

—Isabella Bueno Vieira da Rocha, Brazil, 2011–2012

“After I finished the Au Pair program, I continued my education in the U.S. and completed a Global MBA, which gave an opportunity for me to work as an intern at the United Nations HQ.”

—Wanittha Thirapong, Thailand, 2004–2006

“Au Pair in America has provided me with great opportunities...it allowed me to earn two master's degrees, and allowed me to work for a great company called University of Phoenix in Maryland.”

—Elizabeth Amupanda Baskerville, Namibia, 2004–2005

“I now work at an immigrant house here in Mexico, giving legal advice for human rights. Since being an au pair, I discovered the importance of feeling safe in another country.”

—Priscilla Treviño madero, Mexico, 2009–2011

“I was involved in opening an amusement park for children in my home town in Lithuania. The skills that I have learned in the U.S. while being an au pair helped me to communicate and be persistent about my ideas.”

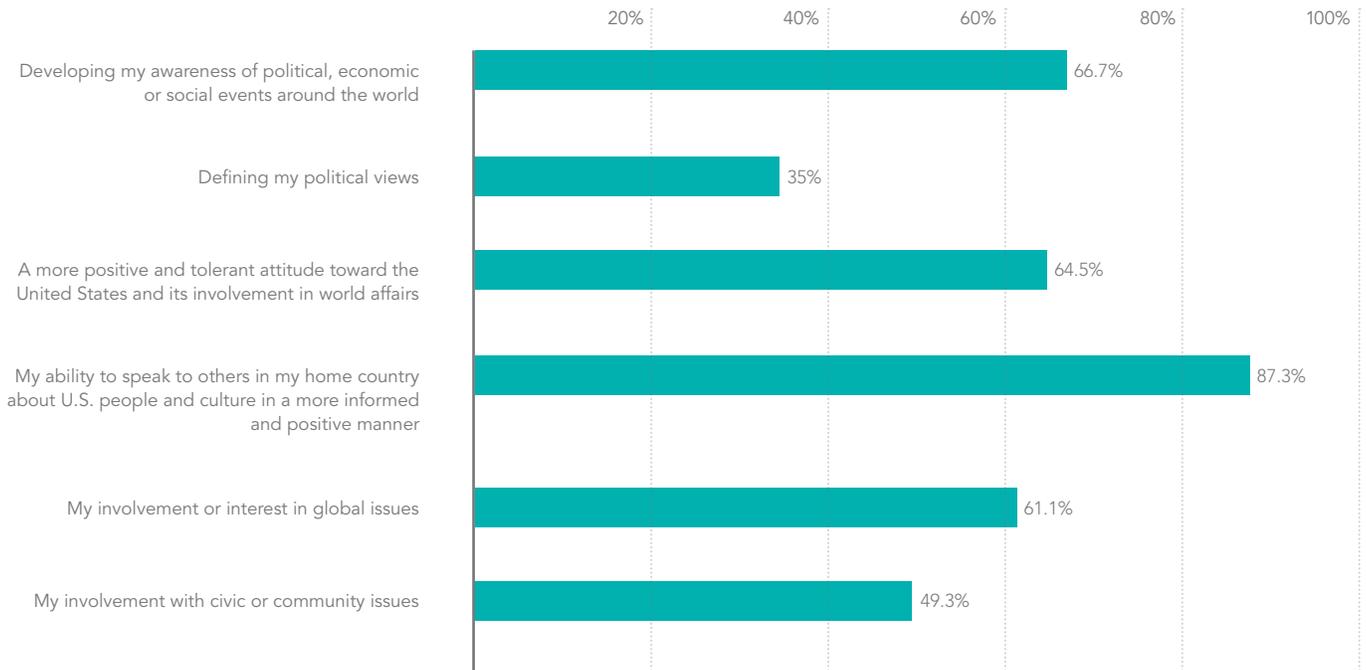
—Kristina Baltutyte, Lithuania, 2002–2003

“I was au pair for a third generation Latvian kid, so I used the opportunity to participate in Latvian-American society. I used the knowledge gained during my au pair year to write my Master's thesis about Latvian Diaspora in U.S. I got interested in migration studies, and since coming back to Latvia I have participated in some international academic projects related to migration.”

—Elina Ivanova, Latvia, 2008–2009

GLOBAL OUTLOOK/LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

My participation as an au pair in the U.S. contributed to:



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

"Being an au pair has been the best experience in my life. I am completely sure that this journey in which I got involved was the perfect way to start my international and intercultural life."

—Sofia Segura, Mexico, 2007–2009

"I have been helping an American NGO (non-governmental organization) with their work of helping women out of prostitution in Thailand as well as trafficking victims. I have also been an intern and been working with a Swedish governmental organization working with international peace and conflict issues and interventions. So, I have a great interest in global issues."

—Sandra Neuman, Sweden, 2008–2009

"I participated in an NGO program which is organized by World Vision—The Famine 30. I participated in the program because I really wish to understand more about the global poverty issue."

—Hewhsia Gan, Malaysia, 2006–2007

“After coming back from the U.S., I have helped implement a different mentality, especially fighting against racism, when it comes to the community that surrounds me. I even designed posters on stopping racism that were shown at an exhibition in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.”

—Sanja Siljanovska, Macedonia, 2008–2009

“After returning to my home country, I have been very interested and occupied in youth policies. I am doing a lot of voluntary work with different people. I have established a youth organization that is actively involved in different projects.”

—Evija Kasa, Latvia, 2008–2010

“Since I lived in the U.S. I travelled a lot. While living there I realized how big the world is and that I wanted to see more of it. I realized how important global awareness is in global communication. I’m from Iceland, lived in New York, and now live in Norway. I’m studying geography with a focus on globalization and resources. I’m involved in all kinds of student organizations, and the international experience that started in my stay as an au pair helps me to get my perspectives out there.”

—Svana Heimisdottir, Iceland, 2008–2009

“I watch BBC or other English-speaking TV channels or radio stations more often. I want to keep informed about things that are going on in the U.S., especially topics that are related to Barack Obama’s policies. He is a great politician.”

—Christiane Kaufmann, Germany, 1999–2000

“I am now more aware of and interested in the conditions in other countries, and I care more about what’s going on in the world and not just what’s happening in my own small home-country.”

—Charlotte Mowitz, Denmark, 1997–1998

Conclusions

The outcomes of our alumni survey, spanning over 25 years, point to the sustaining impact and influence of APIA on the personal life and professional development of program alumni throughout their adult lives.

On each of the three levels in which APIA is expected to achieve results—as an exchange program, as a work abroad program focusing upon child care in the American host’s home, and as an opportunity to introduce international young adults to U.S. culture and community life—the program has succeeded.

In accordance with the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, the intent of the au pair program is to build mutual understanding and help create a foundation of trust between Americans and the rest of the world. There is no doubt that the intense interpersonal interaction of au pairs with their host families and the children in their care has significantly influenced the lives of both au pairs and their American host families and met the key objectives of the Exchange Visitor Program, bringing true global value to American public diplomacy.

LIFELONG IMPACT

There are countless opportunities for international travel, exchange, internships, and volunteer and work abroad experiences for young adults throughout the world. It is worth taking special note of the fact that **87% of respondents stated their APIA experience was “the most meaningful experience in my life.”**

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OTHER OUTCOME STUDIES BY AIFS *(available upon request)*

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Summer Institute for the Gifted Program Outcomes Assessment: Long-term Benefits to Alumni. 2008

Acknowledgments

Martin Tillman, President, Global Career Compass, for contributions to Au Pair in America Program Outcomes: A View from our Alumni 1987–2012.

Au Pairs from around the world who participated in our program, gathered the skills and experience they gained from living in the United States, and embarked on new adventures.

Host Families from across America who embraced au pairs as a member of their family, entrusted them with their children, shared their culture, and took an interest in learning about their au pair's culture. And finally, the children in the families who loved their au pair(s).

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Annette Koelsch
Program Coordinator

About AIFS

2014 will mark 50 years that AIFS has been a leader in study abroad programs for American students. Since its founding in 1964, more than 1.5 million people have participated in AIFS programs. AIFS has more than 150 full-time staff in its Connecticut office; 80 at ACIS in Boston; and a network of area administrators, admissions counselors, and campus representatives across the U.S. There are currently 75 staff in the London office; 30 staff in the German office; and staff in Poland and Australia.

ABOUT AU PAIR IN AMERICA

Au Pair in America is the first organization to be designated by the U.S. Government to offer a legal au pair program. Since 1986, we have placed more than 90,000 au pairs with American host families in 40 states! The program has expanded largely through word of mouth—host families telling friends and neighbors that Au Pair in America provides service, intercultural richness, and a reliable source of quality child care.

To learn more about Au Pair in America, contact us today.

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"Take the leap and grab freedom and independence with both hands. The experience I had as an au pair will be with me for the rest of my life. This opportunity gave me my independence and freedom to choose what would impact my life in a positive way."

—Shalene Goberdan Singh, South Africa, 2008–2009

"Excellent program, opens up possibilities to learn English, make friends from around the world, travel throughout the U.S., get work experience, and study American culture."

—Yulya Genin Sultan-Shakh, Israel, 2008–2009

"It will be the most interesting, the most challenging, the funniest, the hardest, the most exciting, the best year of your life!"

—Susanne Volk Otterback, Germany, 2002–2003



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