

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: REGULATING THE AU PAIR INDUSTRY FOR CHILD SAFETY

I wanted to share our experience of having an au pair. We paid a significant amount of money to an au pair agency to ensure we had an au pair who was suitable for the position. We have 4 children aged 7,5,2 and 10 months and my husband travels regularly for work. We wanted to have an au pair as an extra pair of hands while my husband was away. All work was to be undertaken under my supervision.

Within days it became evident that the au pair which the agency had matched us with had not been properly screened. I contacted the agency with specific safety concerns such as a lack of supervision around roads and car parks (on 2 occasions children in her care had run across roads). We also raised concerns about her social skills and lack of maturity.

Towards the end of the first week the au pair revealed that she wasn't able to "lift heavy things or light things for long periods" due to a congenital shoulder/back condition, which was also present in her knees. At this point we contacted the agency to arrange to discontinue the arrangement with our au pair. I reiterated my concerns about the au pairs suitability to care for young children and informed them of her back injury. Despite these concerns, the agency rehomed her with another family with two children aged 4 & 5. She is to have sole care of these children for up to 10 hours at a time. In addition to the agency refusing us a refund, it is my understanding that the new family would also have had to pay a significant placement fee to the agency for the same au pair.

It is my understanding that our au pair paid her placement fee at the time of application. I do wonder, if the overseas agency receives their cut at time of application, whether it is in their interest to deny access to any of the applicants to the au pair programme, or to further screen any applicants for suitability. From my limited understanding, this application is then uploaded to a database, where Australian 'partner agencies' select candidates, seemingly at random and provide the details to potential families.

Families then interview the candidates under the assumption that they have undergone rigorous screening and select au pairs for placement. Considering our experience, I have grave concerns about child safety. The au pair programme is becoming increasingly popular in this country and as the industry does not fall under the childcare umbrella I would like the Productivity Commission to consider how child safety can be maintained in an unregulated industry which contracts unskilled workers.

Consideration also must be given to the au pairs, some of whom are as young as 18. As potential host families to young women we were not screened at all, and did not provide any references. In hindsight, a very naïve, impressionable young girl was entrusted into our home.