

# Au Pair in America

## *Program Outcomes*

A View from Our Alumni  
1986–2016





# Contents

## **4 Introduction**

### **7 Executive Summary**

Personal Development

Personal Development

Understanding U.S. Culture and Society

Career Direction and Employability

Global Outlook/Local Involvement

## **12 Au Pair Spotlight**

### **14 Survey Findings**

Personal Development

Understanding U.S. Culture and Society

Career Direction and Employability

Global Outlook/Local Involvement

## **20 Conclusions**

Lifelong Impact

## **21 References**

Other Outcome Studies by AIFS

## **22 Acknowledgements**

About AIFS

About Au Pair in America

# *Introduction*

As we celebrate 30 years of Au Pair in America, a division of the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS), we reached out to alumni of the program and asked them 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 is a designated sponsor of the au pair program. This report is the second edition – the first having been issued in 2012. It describes outcomes of a survey we recently conducted of our alumni who participated in the program between 1987 and 2016. 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, sharing their culture, experiencing America, 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, Au Pair in America 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 in over 100,000 young people, from more than 60 countries in Europe, Africa, the Americas, New Zealand, 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 17,000 young people, predominantly women, 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 for more than fifty years and has actively supported the participation of women in all its programs. Over 300,000 women from more than 120 nations have experienced life in the United States through a variety of our sponsored programs, including Au Pair in America and, in addition, as high school exchange students, camp counselors and participants in various other summer programs.

“While in the U.S., I took part in the Global Awareness Initiative, 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

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 three decades. 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, Au Pair in America 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.

Au Pair in America 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 Au Pair in America is our long-standing effort to foster understanding of American society and community life through the Global Awareness Initiative. It brings expanded educational and cultural opportunities to the forefront for our 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 Initiative 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 multi-cultural knowledge.



# *Executive Summary*

The report explores the impacts of Au Pair in America 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 over 30,000 individuals who participated in and completed the Au Pair in America program. We received a response from nearly 10,000 program alumni.

This report is the second one released by Au Pair in America. Our initial survey was conducted with Au Pair in America alumni who participated in the program between 1987 and 2012, with the second survey extending the range of surveyed participants into 2016. Many of the results of the second survey echoed those of the first, reinforcing the benefits of the program for its au pair participants.

Our findings demonstrate that participation in Au Pair in America 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).

## *Understanding U.S. Culture and Society*

A key objective of 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:

- 78% 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.
- 70% 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 86% of respondents to have helped them learn more about U.S. culture.
- 26% 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.

*"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



# 80%

*of respondents said the program provided job opportunities that otherwise would not have been available*

## *Career Direction and Employability*

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 Au Pair in America.

Globalization has witnessed the rising necessity for young people 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 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.

Au Pair in America 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%
Ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments	84%
Decision to work in a field they find interesting and fulfilling	70%
Direction of career choices	59%
Development of intercultural skills that impacted obtaining their first job after leaving the program	66%

There has been a lot of recent research that confirms the importance employers place on the soft intercultural skills that Au Pair in America provides participants. This is likely why we see the importance of the personal and professional skill sets stressed in our survey outcomes. For example, bilingualism research explains 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 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 Au Pair in America 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	93%
Ability to communicate in my home country about U.S. citizens and culture in a more informed and positive manner	86%
Developed my awareness of political, economic and social events around the world	67%
More tolerant attitude toward the U.S. and its involvement in world affairs	62%
Involvement and interest in a global issue	65%

“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

“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

“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



*Being an au pair contributed to...*

**72%**

*...developing strong friendships with people from the U.S. other than their host family*

# Au Pair Spotlight:

*Over three decades, Au Pair in America has welcomed many exceptional young individuals to the program, producing some very heartwarming and unforgettable stories. One such individual is Christina Kraag who had a monumental impact on a family dealing with tragedy.*

Shortly after agreeing to become an au pair with the family of Dr. Terri Halperin and Dr. Michael Davidson, Christina Kraag learned that Michael had been fatally shot while working at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. Christina reached out to Terri to offer condolences, and what followed is a unique and truly heartwarming story of friendship and healing in the wake of a brutal tragedy. What an honor it is to share their story.

Michael and Terri were both surgeons working full-time with three kids at home and one on the way when they decided to find an au pair. They wanted help for Terri's mom, the family's primary child care provider. Terri reached out to Au Pair in America on the recommendation of a coworker.

Michael and Terri interviewed au pair candidates over Christmas vacation and found Christina around New Year's. Despite being just 18 years old, she had perfect English and appeared mature and composed. Terri and her husband agreed that they liked her a lot, and Christina agreed to join the family beginning in February.

Just a few weeks later, Michael was killed at work. He was a prominent cardiac surgeon and his murder received national coverage. Terri was, understandably, overwhelmed and barely functioning. A week later Christina emailed condolences, and Terri responded that she understood if Christina didn't want to come anymore.

"Traveling to a foreign land and entering a house with 4 small children at the age of 18 would be daunting in and of itself," Terri explains. "Now these children had just lost their father and their mother was scrambling to make it through each day. Christina answered that she had talked to the au pair coordinator and that she still wanted to come. That answer made me cry, and when I think about it, it still does. What an incredible character this young woman has."

In April, Terri delivered her fourth child. "It was difficult to be pregnant with three small children, but having a newborn in the house without my husband brought me to my knees. Although Christina was not able to look after the baby initially, she did whatever she could to ease my burden in other ways. She took the children to the playground. She showered them with attention when they were missing mine. She was more mature than any 18-year-old I have ever met."

Terri's mom continues to care for her grandchildren, and she and Christina overlap times. According to Terri, they are good friends and work well together. Terri describes Christina as nothing short of amazing: loving, caring, responsible and funny—strict when needed but fun and carefree otherwise.

Terri also appreciates Christina's presence for giving her the sense of Mike looking out for the family, since he helped find her. "She has listened to the girls talk about memories of their dad. She has seen my three-year-old son walk around the house saying, 'I miss Daddy.' She has watched me cry and scream and survive. She has done it all with a smile on her face and has never complained. My children love her and I do too. She has decided to extend her stay with us for another six months. I could not be happier... She saved us this year."

Before becoming an au pair, Christina interned at a day care. She also thinks her experience tutoring and coaching gymnastics was good preparation for caring for Terri's kids. As to why she was so well-suited to help a family at a time of profound loss, she is not sure.

Christina acknowledges that she joined a family that was in mourning and dealing with a lot of grief, but counters, “I know Terri says such nice things about me, but you have to know that the children are great and open, and Terri is the best host mom. She is accommodating, flexible and fair and supports my discipline with the kids. We are a good match.”

Without a doubt, Terri’s thoughtfulness, kindness, and strength are impressive. Through tears, she talks about experiences that might have crippled many in her situation, yet she carries on with spirit and gratitude. “Don’t sugar coat it, my husband was murdered at work... It has been really hard and overwhelming, but we will always be so thankful to Christina. She’ll be a part of our family forever.”

Terri even extends her thanks to Christina’s family, “How brave of her parents to support her doing this. Even if she was terrible, I’d still appreciate what she did for our family... but she’s been incredible.”

When asked if she would do it again, Christina doesn’t hesitate to say yes. She explains, “I have become more mature and independent and learned what it means to be responsible.” She would have stayed another year but could only extend six months since she has school coming up. She’s still considering her options as far as school and career and is interested in medicine, psychology and architecture.

Terri and Christina both expressed intentions to stay close and keep in touch with social media, calls, Skype and trips in the future. Christina’s favorite memory as an au pair is of a family trip touring Boston with Terri & the kids last summer. She will return home to Germany in August.

It was our privilege to facilitate Christina’s placement with Terri’s family. Our respect for their accomplishments together cannot be understated. We were so moved by their trust and compassion for each other in extremely difficult circumstances. For these reasons, Au Pair in America presented Christina and Terri’s family with a Special Recognition award which includes a round-trip airline ticket for Christina to visit her adoring host family in the future.



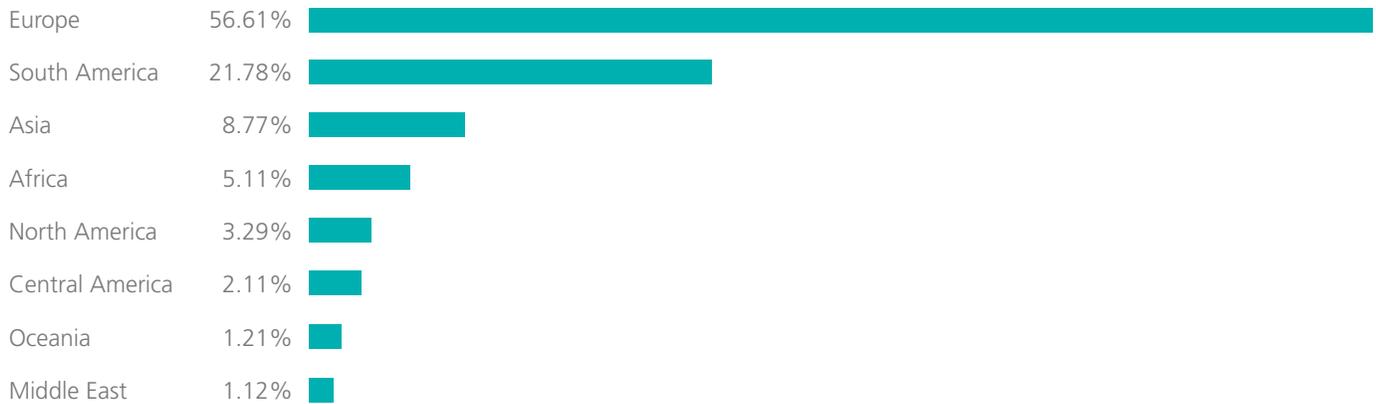
*Christina with her local Au Pair in America community counselor, Ute Smith.*

*“When asked if she would do it again, Christina doesn’t hesitate to say yes. She explains, “I have become more mature and independent and learned what it means to be responsible.”*”

# Survey Findings

## Respondents by Country

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### Africa

Namibia  
South Africa  
Zimbabwe

### Asia

China  
India  
Japan  
Malaysia  
Singapore  
South Korea  
Thailand

### Central America

Costa Rica  
Guatemala  
Panama  
Austria  
Belgium  
Bosnia  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Czech Republic  
Denmark

### Europe

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

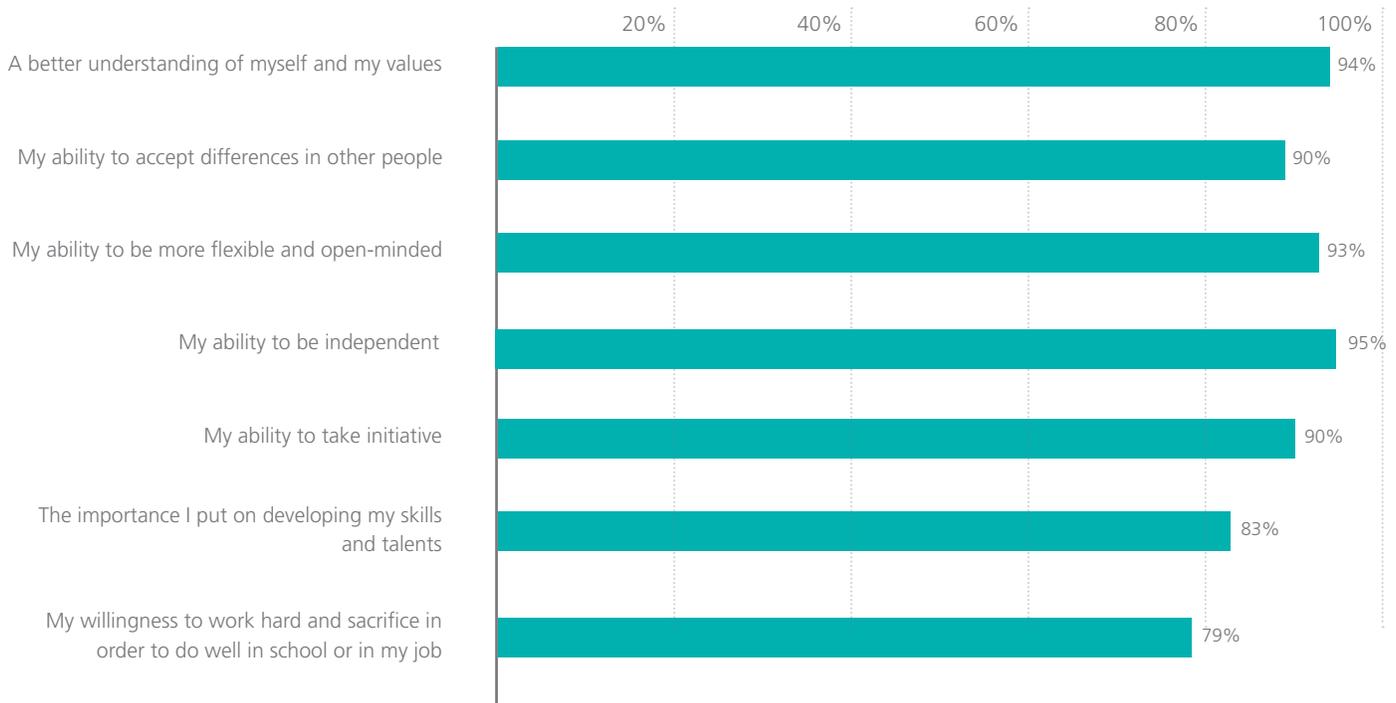


# 95%

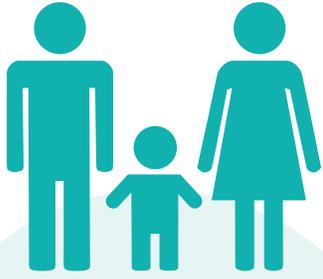
*of respondents said the program has contributed to their self-confidence*

## *Personal Development*

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



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)



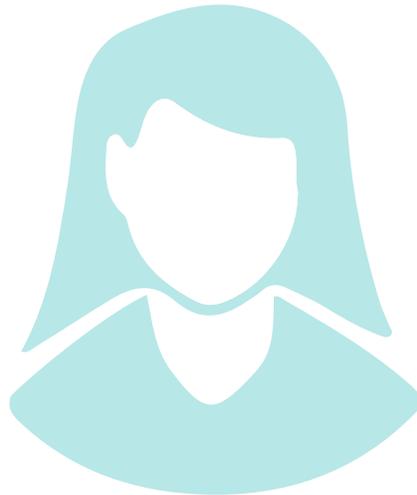
**76%**

*...strengthening of relationships within their own family*



**91%**

*...desire for more diverse friendships and social networks*



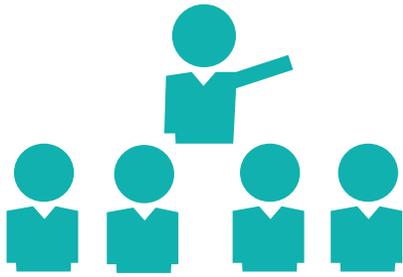
**93%**

*...friendships with people from other countries*



**95%**

*...a sense of confidence in new situations or when meeting new people*



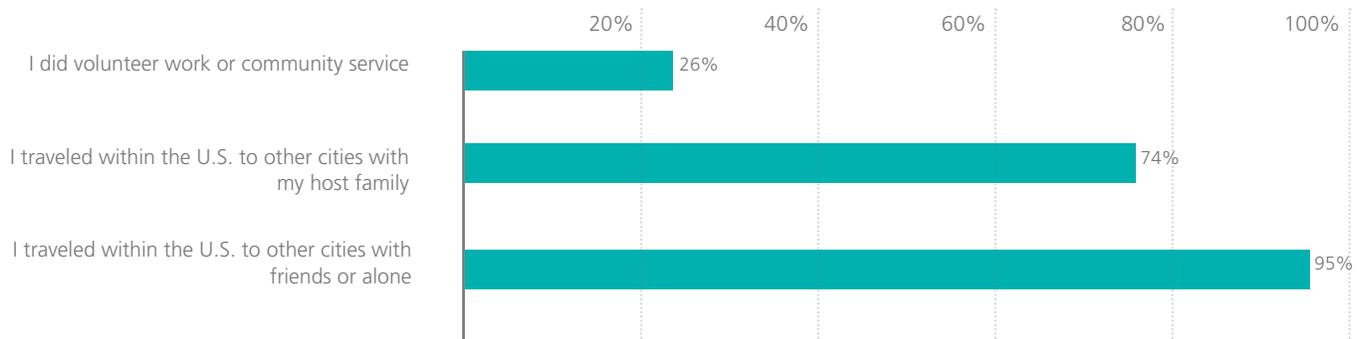
# 86%

*of respondents said that going to college/ university was helpful in learning more about the culture of the U.S.*

## *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-six 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.

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



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

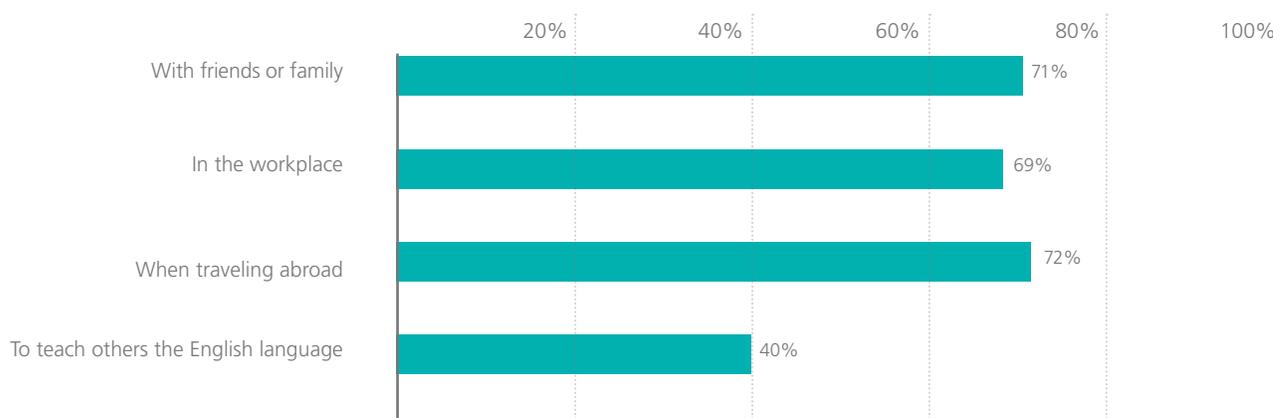


# 84%

*said the program contributed to their ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments*

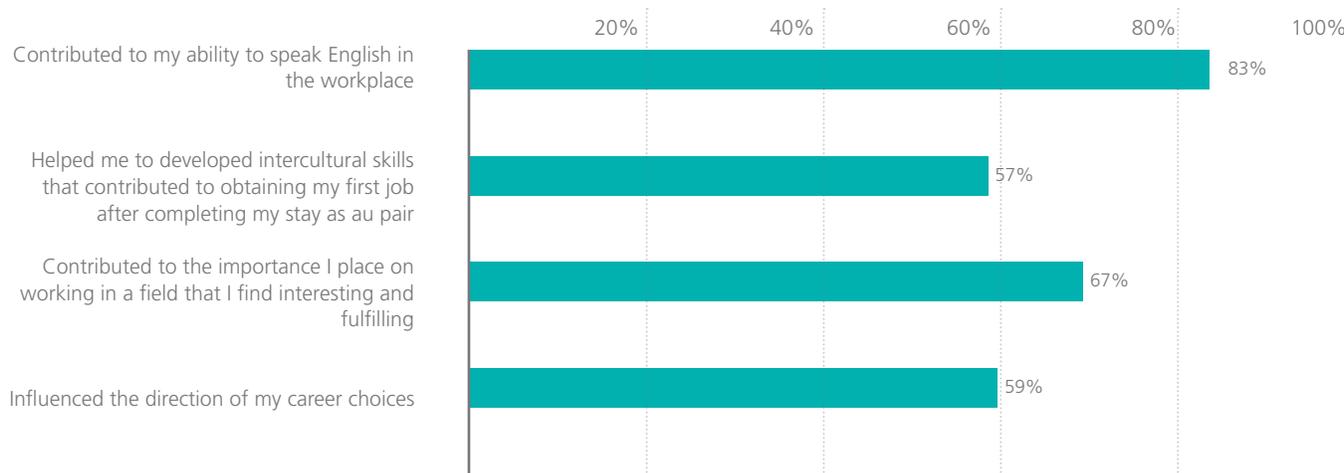
## Career Direction and Employability

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



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

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



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

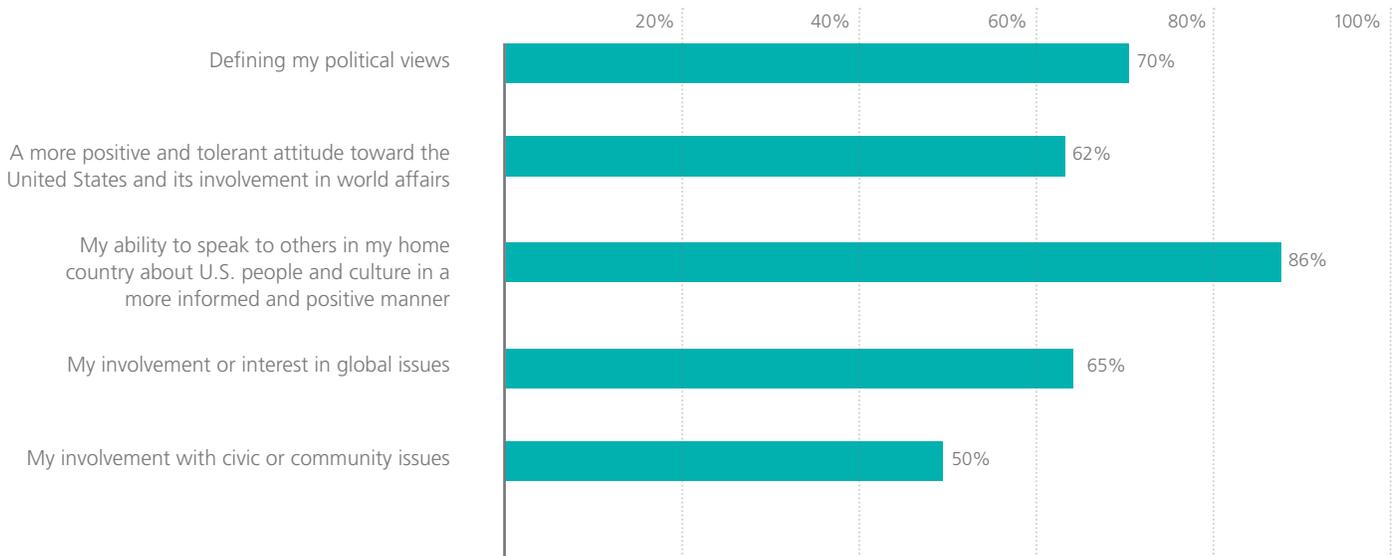


# 67%

*of respondents said the program contributed to developing their awareness of political, economic or social events around the world*

## *Global Outlook/Local Involvement*

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



Findings (% reflect strongly agree & agree)

# Conclusions

The outcomes of our alumni survey, spanning over 30 years, point to the sustaining impact and influence of Au Pair in America on the personal life and professional development of program alumni throughout their adult lives.

On each of the three levels in which Au Pair in America 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.

There are countless opportunities for international travel, exchange, internships, and volunteer and work abroad experiences for young adults throughout the world.



# 86%

*Consider the Au Pair in America program to be the most meaningful experience of their life*

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“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

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

—Rose-Marie Butt, United Kingdom

## *Acknowledgements*

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).

## *About the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS)*

AIFS has been a leader in study abroad programs for American students for more than 50 years. Since its founding in 1964, more than 1.5 million people have participated in AIFS programs. AIFS is headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut with offices in the United Kingdom, Poland, Germany and Australia.

## *About Au Pair In America*

Since 1986, Au Pair in America has placed more than 100,000 au pairs in 43 states. Au Pair in America maintains offices in five countries with a network of more than 600 employees worldwide dedicated to providing you with a reliable source of child care and a once-in-a-lifetime cultural exchange experience for your family.

Our headquarters provides comprehensive support to all program participants. An experienced and dedicated placement team facilitates the selection and distribution of au pair applications for host family review and regional managers assist the activities of our community counselors throughout the country. We also handle the logistics like visas, flights and offer the definitive au pair orientation program in the industry.

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

**800.928.7247 | [www.aupairinamerica.com](http://www.aupairinamerica.com)**

*“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*



a division of the American Institute For Foreign Study, 1 High Ridge Park, Stamford, CT 06905

