

# Cleveland

Dear International Au Pair Association staff,

First, I would like to say what an honor it is to be a finalist for the IAPA award. This nomination has left me speechless!

The one thing I have embraced from my experience as an Au pair is to see that hard work does pay off and that giving your absolute best is affecting someone else's life for the better. Not only did I fall in love with Alana from the first moment I met her but also with her family. They made me feel welcome since day one.

Despite her differences and inability to speak, she is such a blessing in my life and has taught me more than I can teach her. Being Alana's Au pair is not work for me but definitely a passion. There is truly no better feeling than seeing Alana overcome and advance her everyday challenges and helping her to reach her daily goals.

Our first major accomplishment was to attempt to potty train Alana. This had been tried by many but with only small successes. I am overflowing with pride and joy that I was able to potty train Alana. This was something the family thought would never happen. I love watching her try new things. Whether it is trying to pedal her bike, our crazy Zumba dances, teaching her to run, or singing so many songs a day and laughing till our tummys hurt, we definitely have had the most fun this past nine months. I am excited to see what else we can do, stay tuned, there is definitely much more to come.

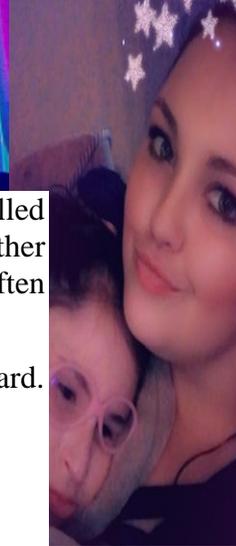
I truly love and embrace this experience and all that it has offered me. There are so many advantages to being an Au Pair. I love helping others, not just Alana. On my time-off, I try to make a difference in the world. I have fed people at the homeless shelters and volunteered with baking and reading to children at the shelters.

I have been fortunate to see other places in the United States, study at a college, experience new cultural traditions, celebrate new holidays, try new foods (America does have the best hamburgers!) play corn hole, sit around the fire and sharing a laugh and eating "s'mores", the list is endless. I embrace everything with a positive attitude. At the end of the day, the best part is spending time and making Alana happy. I have learned there are so many ways to love and care. I have also learned to become a more independent and confident woman. I have learned to live on a budget and save money. I am much more comfortable in my own skin and am no longer ashamed that I gained a lot of weight after being forced to stop my career in Netball due to a fluke medical condition (Compartment Syndrome). I have found my true self and passion these past months, a priceless gift.

How can I ask for any better experience than joining the Au pair program? Sometimes there are days that you miss your family back home, but talking to your friends and family here and going to church does help you to overcome those longings. Luckily, technology allows me to video chat with my family, as we are very close. They have also embraced Alana and love singing her songs in Afrikaans. Her smile makes their day; I wish you could meet this amazing child.

Of course, life is not easy for Alana, I know that but recently experienced firsthand the challenges she will always face. I asked my host family if I could try taking Alana to a trampoline park. I thought she may like it and it could help build her core strength, the family agreed. We were half way through our time and she was jumping with my help, smiling and really enjoying the afternoon, when a worker kicked us out. They said she had to do this alone. I





explained it was impossible and they said too bad and I left crying. My host mom and I called and complained to try and change their attitude, we are still trying. Luckily, we found another place that went out of their way to provide Alana the experience she deserved. We go there often as she LOVES it!

Thank you for this opportunity. I am already a winner having been nominated for this award. This has definitely changed my life for the better.

Kind regards,

Rozelle Botes

