

## Au Pair of the Year nomination for Rani Bonnarens of Belgium Nominated by the Matthews family in Washington, U.S.

I'm a mom and an Emergency Physician, so as you can imagine, these last few years have been quite stressful. Some days I feel like I'm on an endless treadmill of struggles. I've been worried about how to take care of my patients, take care of my family and even how to take care of myself. We live in a beautiful but remote island chain in Washington called the San Juan Islands. (If you've never heard of it, do yourself a favor and look it up!) Resources are limited and childcare is essentially non-existent, especially childcare available around the clock to keep up with the demands of working in the ER! To make matters worse, my partner is in law enforcement and works every weekend and most holidays. We love the au pair model for the flexibility that it allows. It's tricky to find just the right person to fit our family's needs. We do have four energetic children and a big goofy dog, so we're a pretty good time. But life on the island can be a bit lonely, so it's important for us to match with an au pair who wants to spend time with our family and enjoys outdoor activities over city life. We really hit the jackpot with Rani Bonnarens!

Rani came to our family last August. We'd been without childcare help for several months and were limping through with a combination of my aging parents, friends, and no sleep. She showed up with a great attitude and never slowed down. We surprised her the first week she arrived with a trip to Disneyworld. She inserted herself right into the middle of the family chaos and intuitively knew where she fit. From the very first moment, she was helpful and positive, helping with packing, plane travel, bedtime routines and everything else. I've had a lot of au pairs, but this was the first time someone just seamlessly clicked with us. I can't say enough about her competence and professionalism.

She's tremendously useful with daily activities. She's trained as a primary school teacher, so is easily able to help with kids' homework and reading. She does art projects with my twins in her spare time, coming up with the ideas and materials from scratch. My kids are active with her-hiking, beach visits and parks fill the days rather than screens. I've been impressed with her conflict resolution skills and how she is able to masterfully work with even my teen's sometimes edgy attitude. To say that my kids love her and she loves my kids is a gross understatement. She is so helpful with household chores, always putting away groceries, doing dishes, laundry, and taking out the trash. I sometimes have to chase her away on her days off so she gets some rest!! We've had a few weeks of terrible weather; we got snowed in, changed her scheduled, and had to move her days off. She never even complained.

Above and beyond her duties, she's been an incredible asset to our family. We left her for a ski trip to Canada and gave her the week off. Instead of resting, she used the time to clean our home top to bottom and even organized the kitchen cupboards! It hasn't been all work, though. In keeping with the spirit of cultural exchange, she's been participating in holiday observances by joining in with trick-or-treating, cooking the Thanksgiving meal with us, and of course Christmas morning! She's also had the opportunity to travel and visit various places around the US including Florida and San Diego. She completed an au pair weekend course in Texas and learned how to ride horses and use a bullwhip! In her free time, she volunteers at the animal shelter, helping with dog walking and taking care of furry patients after their surgeries. Her energy is limitless. She also volunteered for a social media takeover to help other au pair candidates live their dreams.

I feel that she deserves to be named as Au Pair of the Year because of all the amazing things she's done. She's provided strong and desperately needed support to me and my husband so that we can do our best work as first responders in this time of national crisis. She's active in the community as evidenced by her commitment to volunteer work. And above all, she's the ideal for an au pair; a wonderful, caring, kind, brilliant and dedicated role model of a "big sister" for our children.