

Response to Inaccurate Article Regarding Au Pair Cultural Exchange Program

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/au-pair-america-cultural-care_n_5f204d6ac5b69fd473126c61

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The HuffPost recently published, “Au Pairs Come To The U.S. Seeking Cultural Exchange, But The State Department Often Fails To Protect Them.” Unfortunately, this article does not accurately depict the au pair cultural exchange program satisfaction rates by participants and the rigorous health and safety measures in place. Moreover, the article uses problematic methodology to reach its conclusion.

For many years, data collected by the U.S. Department of State has shown that the vast majority of au pairs and their host families have a positive experience while participating in the program. That is also true about the 2016 data cited in the article. The Department reported then that 89% of respondents rated the overall program experience as excellent or good. In the same study, 90% of respondents rated host family experience and English language practice as excellent or good. Regulations require that the surveys are evaluated by an independent auditor each year to ensure accuracy.

The article discounts those numbers with a deeply flawed approach based on interviews of 125 former and current au pairs. Here is what EurekaFacts, an independent research firm, says in assessing this approach: “No meaningful conclusion projected to the entire Au Pair program can be drawn from qualitative interviews that represent around .01% of participants taking part in the past few years.” While the article contends that some of the interviewed au pairs had negative experiences in the program, those that volunteered to be interviewed for the story cannot be considered a representative sample.

The article suggests that since 19% of au pairs did not complete the program, the satisfaction rates could not possibly be so high. However, of the 15% of au pairs who voluntarily left the program in 2016, two-thirds (70%) left for personal reasons like homesickness or family emergencies. Of the 4% of au pairs whose programs ended involuntarily, a strong majority (64%) departed because of an inability to be “rematched” with a new family. When looking at the total sample size of au pairs in 2016, only 1.5% were asked to leave the program for reasons other than inability to re-match

EurekaFacts concludes: “The quantitative data demonstrates that leaving the program early or re-matching does not connote a negative experience within the program. In the same data set, 13% of au pairs were able to re-match with a new family. Early departing and re-matched participants were included in surveys that show 90% satisfaction rates.”

Faced with a set of data that does not support its conclusion, the article seeks to impugn those who report the data, but fails to mention that every report is certified by an independent accountant.

This is an example of an article that starts with an argument and then stretches the data to support it. Instead, it should reflect a long-established truth represented in the 2016 data it purports to

analyze: overwhelmingly large majorities of participants and host families are satisfied with their experience in the Au Pair cultural exchange program. The data also illustrates that the exchange program achieves its goals of increasing understanding of American and international culture, strengthening the skills of participants, and creating deep ties between peoples that cross borders and generations.

For those and many other reasons, the U.S. Department of State and Congress celebrate and support the Au Pair cultural exchange program, one in which tens of thousands of young people apply every year to participate, and over 20,000 families representing virtually every state decide to serve as hosts.