

Enjoy Kent's Cultural childcare this summer

It is about this time each year that parents begin to ask the same question, "What will the kids be doing for the summer?" For parents who have busy schedules, it can be challenging to meet summer child care needs for school-aged children.

Some parents mix and match from assorted options: a week with the grandparents, a week at day camp, two weeks of activities through the town's recreation department. By the time it's all said and done, parents need a holiday from summer holiday. But one Kent au pair agency is hoping to bring a unique solution to the area in order to help meet the needs of local parents — a summer au pair.

An au pair is usually a young adult from a foreign country who is there to care for children. Nicole Kofkin is spreading the word about the Summer Au Pair program through Smartaupairs.

"With a summer au pair, parents can relax and take comfort in knowing that their child is going to have a great summer with someone they can trust," says Nicole.

Nicole, who coordinates this au pair service, is Dutch and speaks 4 languages and lived in 6 different European countries. She knows firsthand about the benefits of being exposed to new languages and cultures.

Through this program, a young adult over 18 lives with a host family for the summer. In exchange for room, board and a weekly pocket money, the au pair provides up to 35-40 hours* of child care each week. The total cost of the program averages about £100-£120 a week — regardless of the number of children in the family. 35+ hours is ONLY during school holidays, usually an au pair is expected to cover 25-35 hours of childcare.

Au pair candidates are screened for appropriate child care experience, English language ability and education, says Nicole. Further, candidates go through a rigorous application process, which includes interview, personal references and background checks such as Medical and Police reports. Only the best can travel!

Once an au pair is accepted into the program, the candidate is matched with a potential host family. A host family also completes an



application, in which family members describe themselves, their lifestyle, their children and child care needs. A family may also indicate preferences, such as a male or female, or a specific foreign language. Smartaupairs does the preliminary matching, but the final decision lies with the host family, which conducts an interview.

"If they like the au pair, they let us know and we prepare the contract, welcome pack, etc. If they do not like the applicant, we find another one until a good match is made," explains Nicole. Like any foreign exchange student, an au pair may experience homesickness.

Nicole continues to stay in touch with both the host family and the au pair to make sure the summer runs smoothly for both. If for whatever reason, the fit is not a good one, provisions are made for a change, but there may be a break in service.

Any families interested in hosting a summer au pair needs to apply by 12th June, after this date, choice of candidates may be much more limited. Long term au pairs can be arranged throughout the year. To find out more call 01233 712500.