

Professional au pairs increase in South Africa

More young people are choosing to become professional au pairs in response to an increased demand for qualified childcare professionals.



“With the growth in the South African middle class and the increasing number of single households or ones where both parents work full-time, many people are seeking the services of au pairs to take care of their children; from babies and toddlers to high school learners,” says Nomawabo May, team leader: student advisor department at Oxbridge Academy.

“Although there has always been a demand for babysitters and nannies, the difference now is that people seek out dedicated au pairs for their children, demand a minimum level of competence and qualification and are prepared to pay accordingly.

“Additionally, professional au pairs often make it clear in their CVs that the field is not a side-job or an additional income generator, but a dedicated career choice. Au pairing can be a very satisfying career and can provide a good, sustainable income.”

Growth of support systems

“The increase in demand for qualified au pairs has led to the growth of an entire supporting industry, with au pair placement services and online support systems and even apps, blossoming across the country.

Although salaries vary depending on qualifications, experience, specific placement and working hours; an au pair working eight hours, Monday to Friday, can expect a salary in the region of R13,000. Regular hourly rates are around R80 per hour during the day and around R160 per hour for overnight care, while driving duties are remunerated at about R110 per hour. If tutoring is provided, the au pair is remunerated at about R155 per hour.

May says that enrolment figures at Oxbridge Academy, which caters to 20 000 students annually and is one of South Africa's fastest-growing distance learning institutions, have shown a consistent increase in people seeking au pair training and educare qualifications. Enrolment figures for these courses have doubled and more this year, compared to the same period last year.

"Educare qualifications are proving to be a particularly popular choice. This is not surprising, because au pairs wishing to learn more than just an au pairing qualification, and who are using this line of work as a stepping-stone towards a career in early childhood development, have the option to study the N4 – N6 national qualifications. Due to the flexible nature of distance learning, students can complete the N4 qualification and then start working as au pairs, while they complete their N5 and N6 qualifications part-time. Choosing this option often also gives students an advantage in the job application process."

Au pair requirements

While parents and caregivers are increasingly looking at appointing an au pair to assist in their homes, they have become much more discerning when considering which candidates to interview.

Most parents will now expect au pairs to have:

1. Relevant qualification, such as an au pair or educare certificate
2. Driver's licence (if driving is required)
3. First aid training
4. Sober lifestyle and no criminal background
5. Mature and positive attitude
6. Experience
7. Ability to facilitate a structured programme, such as tutoring for older children or engaging in educational activities for younger ones

"In addition to opening doors to an interesting and stimulating career in South Africa, au pairing has the rare added benefit of providing work opportunities in many countries across the world.

"Au pairing is a great choice for people who are responsible, adaptable, patient and great with kids. As an au pair, you will have many and varied duties related to looking after a family's children. In addition to making sure they are nurtured and happy, your duties are likely to include tutoring, playing with younger kids, preparing meals and snacks, taking them to sport and going on outings. Duties may also include light household chores and cleaning.

"Although au pairs are unlikely to earn extravagant salaries in their careers, the satisfaction of the work and the opportunities to broaden one's horizons on a shoestring budget, are attractive drawcards.

"However, it is very important for anyone considering making child's play their life's work to ensure that they do so professionally and work only with reputable agencies once qualified. Doing so increases one's earning capacity and reputation, and supports the development of the industry as a whole," concludes May.

For more information, go to www.oxbridgeacademy.edu.za.

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