**Interviews with families hosting au pairs in the UK 2012-2014**

We interviewed 15 au pair hosts who between them had hosted over 50 au pairs over a number of years. These interviews were extremely fruitful for discovering how some hosts understand and negotiate relationships with au pairs, how these change over time as children age and as hosts become more experienced at living with au pairs.

**Aims of the interviews**

We aimed to interview 40 people (men and women) who had employed or who currently did employ someone they identified as an ‘au pair’. We wished to learn more about why the services of an au pair had been required. Was it for cultural exchange? To have someone else in the house for security or for company? Was it a language exchange opportunity? Was it a way of getting someone to do childcare and housework for less money than it would cost to pay a cleaner and a nanny? We also wanted to know about employers’ childcare philosophies and how hiring an au pair sat with those. We were interested in how people went about hiring an au pair and how they experienced issues of intimacy, home and self when an au pair was present in the home. We wanted to know how hiring an au pair affected relationships between mother, father and child(ren) and between parents. We were also interested in whether employers felt there was an ethnic hierarchy at work when they hired an au pair. Did employers have preconceptions about what nationalities made the best au pairs? Finally we wanted to know the answers to more prosaic questions such as how many hours au pairs worked?; How many children were cared for?; Were pets also looked after by the au pair?; How much pocket money was thought appropriate?; Did employers use an au pair agency?, word of mouth?, websites?; Did they enjoy having an au pair in the house? and so on.

**Making contact with employers for interview**

We were surprised to find that making contact with employers of au pairs who were prepared to be interviewed about their experiences was one of the most challenging aspects of the project. The surprise was because based on experiences of previous research projects we had assumed that we would be able to make contact with employers more easily through agencies, personal contacts, advertising on websites such as mumsnet and through snowballing. However, we found this was not the case and it was a frustrating aspect of the project. We offered a £10 M&S voucher to all those interviewed.

*Agencies*

We contacted au pair agencies to ask if we could send out a flier to employers on their books but we had no response.

*Gumtree*

We responded to ads placed by prospective employers explaining the purpose of the study and asking if the advertiser was interested in participating. However, the RA on the project received a number of rude, abusive and rather threatening responses to this tactic as people resented the ‘intrusion’ from an outside party. This tactic was abandoned.

*Social media/facebook*

We attempted to make contact with employers by posting ads on facebook pages used by families seeking an au pair and by placing ads on sites such as mumsnet and netmums. We had no success with the facebook postings and very limited success with the ad on mumsnet.

*Personal contacts*

We found the only reliable method for recruiting employers willing to be interviewed was through personal contacts and word of mouth. This was limited to the number of people who fit the criteria for interview that we knew or could make contact with through friends and contacts. Also, for one of the two interviews who drew on contacts through her neighbourhood network and through her children’s school, this risked blurring boundaries between personal and professional and meant that she felt uncomfortable with interviewing people she had daily contact with.

**Summary of details of host interviews**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Code name | How contacted | Size of family | Age of children | Number of au pairs had | Pocket money paid | Pets? | Hours required | Full or part –time worker |
| Arthur | School contact | 2 adults, 2 kids | 4 and 10 | 6 | £75 | £75 | 25 + 2 babysitting | Dad full time; mum part time |
| June | Network | 2 adults, 2 kids | 12, 9 | multiple | evasive |  | varies | Dad full time; mum part time |
| Jo | School contact | 2 adults, 2 kids | 4 and 10 | 6 | £75 | no | 25 + 2 babysitting | Dad full time; mum part time |
| Lucy | Network | 2 adults, 1 kid | 11 | About 10 | £70-£75 | no | 25 + babysitting | Both full time |
| Stephanie | Network | 1 Adult and 1 kid | 11 | 2 | Can’t remember | no | 25 + bbaysitting | Full time  Single parent |
| Siri | Network | 1 adult and 1 kid | 9 | 10 |  | No | varies | Full time  Single parent |
| Laura | network | 2 adults and 2 kids | 10 and 1 | 7 | £105 | no | 35 | Both full time |
| Poppy | network | 2 adults and 2 kids | 10 and 8 | 7 | £70 | no | varies | Mum full time; Dad irregular |
| Ellie | Network | 2 adults and 3 kids | 4 and 18 month twins | 1 | £80 | no | 25 + babysitting | Dad full time; mum part time |
| Stacey | Network | 2 adults and 2 kids |  | multiple | varied | no | varies | Both full time |
| Richard | Network | 2 adults; 4 kids | 7, 11, 15, 18 | multiple | varied | yes | 25 + | Dad full time; mum no |
| Tessa | Network | 2 adults and 2 kids | 3 and newborn | 1 | £100 | - | 25 | Dad yes; mum no. Hours varied |
| Niamh | Network | 1 adult and 1 kid | 9 | 3 | No comment | no | 25 plus babysitting | yes |
| Eleanor | mumsnet | 2 adults and 2 kids | 9 and 3 | 1 | £80 | no | 30 | Dad full time; mum not working |
| Jack | network | 1 adult and 2 kids | 8 and 11 | 1 | No pay | no | 25 + | Full time  Single parent |