

The Australian

In-demand au pairs call for nanny status

- by: Patricia Karvelas and Sophie Gosper
- From: The Australian
- February 07, 2012 12:00AM



Katrin Schape looks after Anika, 9, and Daniel, 6, while their parents work in Melbourne. The au pair industry wants the childcare rebate to apply to live-in nannies. Picture: Stuart Mcevoy

Source: The Australian

LIVE-IN nannies are often derided as an indulgence for rich families, but working mother of two Nicole Spicer says that without au pairs she would not have been able to continue working as a lawyer.

Ms Spicer, who has employed two German au pairs via AIFS Au Pair in Australia and is about to welcome a third to help look after her children Anika, 9, and Daniel, 6, is not alone.

A surge in demand for au pairs, as working families search for a flexible, high-quality childcare option, has sparked a push for changes to rules governing visas for in-home nannies and childcare rebates.

Ms Spicer backed the au pair industry's campaign for the childcare rebate to be extended to apply to live-in nannies as well as daycare. "We enjoy the company of the girls and getting to know them, their families, and their culture. It's very enriching," Ms Spicer said.

"It would ease the burden for other childcare services and make it accessible to more families."

As well as changes to childcare benefits, the industry wants visas for au pairs to be extended. At the moment, au pairs are allowed to live with the same family only for six months.

Ms Spicer and her husband work full-time at separate law firms and say hiring an au pair has given them more time with their children and each other without the added demands of running a household.

"It alleviates an enormous amount of stress for me at both ends of the day," Ms Spicer said. "We still get to spend

heaps of time with the kids, but if we're held back late at work it's easy to make arrangements. And in terms of preserving your personal relationship it's a godsend."

AIFS Au Pair in Australia managing director Wendi Aylward said yesterday the demand for au pairs had never been higher. "We have received a 150 per cent increase in requests for au pairs in the past year," she said. "Families are seeking flexible childcare solutions and a cost-effective alternative to other childcare options in the market.

"We support the introduction of an au pair visa and like many agencies we will be lobbying the government for its introduction." Ms Aylward added that, given the high demand for au pairs, agency-supported placements should be considered under the childcare rebate.

Cultural Care Au Pair program director Daniella Storm said many families were turning to the program, but the six-month maximum work placement stipulation was limiting.

Childcare Minister Kate Ellis said the government supported a range of childcare options, but recognising au pairs was difficult because they did more than childcare.
