Protections for Domestic Workers: Spotlight on Au Pairs
April 2016

Background:
• Approximately 13,000 au pairs come to the United States from around the world each year.
• Au pairs are between the ages of 18-26 and are mainly women. They provide flexible, in-home childcare for up to 45 hours per week or 10 hours a day.
• Though Department of State regulations articulate that au pairs are protected by federal and state minimum wage and overtime protections, it is common practice for au pairs to receive a stipend of $195.75 per week, or what amounts to $4.35 per hour. These wages are far below federal and state standards.

J1 Visas:
• Au pairs come to the United States through the J1 visa program, a cultural exchange visitor program under the oversight of the U.S. Department of State.
• Au pairs are classified for immigration purposes as exchange visitors, but when they are working to provide essential childcare services to host families they are employees.
• Au pairs often pay recruitment fees and other visa-related expenses to come to the U.S. Pressures to pay these large debts make it harder to leave abusive or exploitative working conditions.

Role of Au Pair Sponsoring Agencies:
• Au pairs are sponsored by agencies in the U.S. Au pairs can only change host families with the consent of these sponsoring agencies.
• Au pair agencies often take no action when au pairs complain about their working conditions.
• Sponsoring agencies can re-designate the status of au pairs in ways that affect their immigration status.
• The State Department provides almost no oversight of au pair agencies.
• Au pair agencies make millions of dollars of profits form the au pair program through programmatic fees paid by au pairs and host families.
• Au pair sponsoring agencies have repeatedly lobbied in federal and state venues to deny au pairs and other workers basic labor protections.

Au pairs perform the essential caregiving work that makes all other work possible. Au pairs, in accordance with the law, must be paid according to federal and state minimum wage and overtime protections and should be covered under state Domestic Worker Bill of Rights legislation.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) works for the respect, recognition and inclusion in labor protections for domestic workers. For further information contact Sameera Hafiz, Advocacy Director at sameera@domesticworkers.org.