

**MAKING** young children follow instructions poses a challenge to most.

Explaining them in a foreign language has proved even more taxing for the newcomer to a Kumeu household, Annika Nolte.

The German au pair found it difficult to give directions in English to her charges, Timothy, 3, and Celine, 5, when she first joined the Eckard household nine months ago.

"At first it was very tiring," says the 19-year-old from Sustedt, in north west Germany.

"It's easier now because the children know I'm a person they have to listen to. I'm not so afraid anymore to say something wrong in English."

Annika has since built a close relationship with the children, thriving on seeing them grow and learn new skills.

"Timothy for example was not so confident with sport things but now he tries the monkey climb and he helps with the swinging. He talks more now."

Annika enjoyed taking the children to explore new places like the museum and seeing their delighted reactions.

Through Au Pair Link New Zealand, she minded the youngsters, did light housework, grocery shopping and cooked some dinners in exchange for board, a cash allowance and the cultural experience.

She conquered such challenges as driving on the other side of the road and learning to use the washing machine.

The au pair describes New Zealand as beautiful because of its different landscapes.

"I'm very fascinated with the country."

Annika returned home on August 1 to apply for university.



**Swapping stories:** New au pair Lisa Mehrling, left, and her predecessor Annika Nolte chat with employer Carla Eckard of Kumeu.

Photo: CARYN WIGMORE

**I like children because I find it amazing they're so fascinated with small things.**

German au pair Lisa Mehrling

Taking her place is new au pair Lisa Mehrling, aged 18, from Bad Gandersheim, north of Germany.

"I like children because I find it amazing they're so fascinated with small things," Lisa says.

"You can have a lot of fun with them."

Employer Carla Eckard says she prefers having an au pair after earlier enrolling her children in fulltime daycare.

"They interacted with

the children [at daycare] but they didn't have any personal interaction," she says.

Mrs Eckard admits some critics may label her lazy for having in-home help.

But the busy businesswoman says it is a way of gleaning quality moments with Timothy and Celine.

"It opens up that loop-hole where you can spend some time with your children rather than being in the rat

Au Pair Link New Zealand founder Cecilia Robinson has won this year's Businesswoman of the Year award.

She is expecting her first child.

Some of her employees are male and are dubbed

"race the whole time," Mrs Eckard says.

Mrs Eckard manages the New Zealand service desk for a company which specialises in a software system called SAP from Germany.

## AWARD WINNER

"mopairs" in the office. Au Pair Link is Australasia's largest au pair agency. It was the first agency in the world to become licensed through the ministry of education as a home-based early childhood education service.

Husband Leslie runs his own consultancy firm.

"I think I've become a lot more relaxed from the point of view you're not consistently racing trying to get to everything,"



Mrs Eckard says. "It's helped my relationship with the children because I'm not consistently saying, 'no, I can't do that because I'm having to make dinner.'" "We gain time."