

Voice of America video (English translation of Greek video):

By Elena Efthymiou, the older sister of Andria Efthymiou (CFP 2012 group). This is another example, of how more and more people are voluntarily offering their time for the work of CFP:

“The Cyprus Friendship Programme bets into the new generation and promotes understanding and dialogue between the two communities through a program in the U.S.

As part of the Cyprus Friendship Programme, another group of children from Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities came this year to the U.S. to get to know each other and have together the American experience. This is precisely the goal of the program, to promote dialogue and understanding between the two communities starting with the younger generation, the people who will be invited to provide solutions to the problems of their country in the future.

In a visit to the studio of the Voice of America, teens from Cyprus spoke with enthusiasm and realism about their experience, as the 17 year old Costas Paschalides from Limassol.

‘This is the purpose of this program, to create friendships. I personally met incredible people who gave me so much strength and helped me realize that to believe in a cause and to fight for this cause is the most important thing and someday you will achieve it’.

A similar belief has the 16 year old Xenia from Nicosia. ‘The program teaches us that we can live together, we can be together, we can have friends. Being Turkish-Cypriot or Greek-Cypriot doesn’t matter in any way’.

For her roommate, Mounise, living in the occupied part of Nicosia, her interaction with Greek-Cypriot peers was revealing.

‘I had no relations with Greek-Cypriots before the program. I visited with my family the south but because we do not speak Greek and they do not speak Turkish, we had lack in communication. I started meeting Greek-Cypriots when I applied to participate in the program and began learning English. Then I realized how much alike we are and their lives are similar to ours’.

Teenagers from Cyprus come to the U.S. for four weeks, participating in seminars on conflict resolution and live with a peer of the other community hosted by American families.

‘We live with incredible families,’ Xenia said. ‘The host families in America are amazing. They open their houses to total strangers. They don’t know our family and open their home and accept to accommodate two children, two teenagers...’

The development of intercultural friendships, mutual respect and understanding, historically breaking stereotypes and distrust that exists between the two communities in Cyprus, is a main focus of the program.

‘We take a step towards finding a solution,’ Nicolas said, ‘because the more and more people that are converted to the belief that we can live in peace again, the better and that’s exactly what this

program does.'

The 15 year old Nicholas Michael from Nicosia was the youngest member of the group. He believes that his generation will be able to bridge their differences and possibly solve the problem in Cyprus. 'I believe that my generation is more liberal, we are more open to meeting new people whereas our grandparents' generation and even our parents' generation still had grudges against the other side. So I believe that eventually we can become friends again.'

But Katerina from Paphos does not agree. 'I do not think that my generation can do it. It might help to begin something, but to make a difference I think that new generation should come with new ideas and then something actually will happen.'

But the Turkish-Cypriot Volkan who goes to a Greek-Cypriot school in Nicosia , sees some light at the end of the tunnel.

'I believe that the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities are harmonious societies. Unfortunately they were pushed in two different directions and had different experiences. It will take time to leave their painful experiences behind and start a new way of approaching the problem.'

However, returning to Cyprus, the students who participated in the program are determined to keep contact and enrich their friendships they developed with the Turkish-Cypriot peers who met in the U.S...."