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# Cyprus teens bridge divide in NH

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So much separates the Greek and Turkish populations of Cyprus. Their language. Their religion. A United Nations-maintained buffer zone.

But in their humanity, they are united.

Through the Cyprus Friendship Program, Greek and Turkish Cypriot teenagers have been coming together to meet and build relationships and leadership skills, in hopes that they will be able to build a generation that has an understanding of the other side. And as part of that program, the teens spend a month in the United States – including Peterborough, Temple and Hancock – with host families, living together as siblings.

“Cyprus is so divided that it got to the point that I realized I had never met people from the other side,” said Katerina Koudouna, 17, who is currently with a host family in Temple. “We have this idea that we’re very different, but as we talk, we realize that we actually have many of the same traditions and experiences.”

“We grew up in this divided country,” said Misra Vamik, 17. “My major purpose in coming here is to help heal that divide.”

In the month they are spending in the United States, the teens take the time to enjoy the sights of the area with their host family – swimming in lakes, which are a rare commodity on the island of Cyprus, climbing Mount Monadnock and visiting museums. There are also dedicated days for them to meet with other Cypriot teens in the area for group activities.

And while the dividing lines were clear when the group got off the plane, now when they get together, they act as one integrated group, said Ginny Kemp of Peterborough, who was acting as a host mother to some of the Cyprus teens.

“It’s a pretty powerful program. I love seeing them grow and change and bond,”

said Kemp.

And while the teens have been exploring the differences between America and Cyprus – the green of New Hampshire, the changeable weather, the uniquely American holiday of the Fourth of July, the cultural differences of its people – in true adherence to the goals of the program, they see more similarities than differences.

“One thing that is similar to us, is that when we are walking around everyone is friendly and says hello. It’s very much the same in Cyprus,” said Ceyda Uysal, 17. “It just shows how similar we really are as people.”

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