

## Bi-communal teen friendship group delighted with ministry support

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By Annette Chrysostomou

The bi-communal Cyprus Friendship Programme (CFP), which aims at breaking down barriers between Greek and Turkish Cypriot teenagers, has been given a big boost by the education ministry, Sotia Adamidou, Greek Cypriot coordinator of the CFP said on Monday.

The ministry has now sent a memo to all public high schools and technical schools informing them about the aim of the programme and encouraging them to facilitate presentations by the non-profit organisation.

“It is important that all pupils – private and state school students – get to value this great programme,” Adamidou said. “So far many state school head teachers were reluctant to embrace the programme, as the ministry didn’t show any support. This memo is the first sign of support in the eight years the programme has been running.”

The CFP is an all-volunteer peace building bi-communal project for young Greek and Turkish Cypriots and their families. Each year, a bi-communal team of Cypriot coordinators selects an equal number of teens from both communities. Each teen then chooses another of the same gender from the other community with whom he/she believes they can be great friends.

Every year in July five groups of four to seven pairs travel to various locations in the US and are hosted for one month by families who cover all the expenses during the teens’ stay.

While the programme has long been popular among students from private schools on both sides of the divide, the response within the state school system has been more muted. CFP organisers hope that official approval means that will now change.

The signs are already positive, though the ministry approval has come a little for this year’s programme.

“We are grateful to the ministry for their courage,” Adamidou said. “There is not much time left to visit the state schools this year, because the deadline is February 29. But headmasters have actually made known the information to the students. We have had calls from all over Cyprus several times a day from parents asking if their children can take part.

“From next year I will inform the schools early when they make their timetable so they can fit us in. It is not easy just to invite us now because there is not much time.”

Teenagers eligible to apply must be aged 15 to 18, must not be in the final school year and at least one of their parents must be Cypriot.

“Though the students must speak English, they don’t have to be from English speaking private schools,” Adamidou explained. “Their English does not have to be that good, they only have to be able to communicate.”

<http://www.cyprusfriendship.org/>