



Last week, the 2014 CFP teens being hosted in the US this July were given information about their host families, and the host families were given the names and contact information of the teens whom they will host. This is a very exciting time for all involved, and it is one filled with great expectations. It is also perhaps a good time to share the background on some of the features and policies of the Cyprus Friendship Program.

When the Cyprus Friendship Program was established, it adopted the practices and policies that had been refined and used over the years by the Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland, Inc. (CFPNI), the all-volunteer program that ran from 1987-2007. Three practices and policies are interrelated and are ones that I'm often asked about. These are the ages of the teens, the duration of the hosting, and the communications policy during the period of hosting.

All three of these are based upon a desire to offer potential future leaders of communities an opportunity to promote trust, understanding, and friendships with others across a divide. The three also are intended to give the teens a concentrated period of time in which to learn about themselves, to encounter other cultures and ideas, and to start developing adult identities away from divisions at home.

CFPNI tried different age groups in its early days and settled on the range of 15-17 years old for the participants. This age range is old enough for the teens to act responsibly while away from home and to be open to considering new ideas, but not too old to be rigid in their views or to have been recruited into paramilitary or other divisive organizations. The choice of age was also made to ensure that the participants have at least one year after their summer together at home before heading off to university or military service.

Originally CFPNI had a six-week hosting period. That worked well in terms of meeting the objectives above. However, in its latter years CFPNI shortened the time to four weeks because it became increasingly difficult to find American families with

an adult home for a six-week duration. CFPNI (and CFP) believe that while four weeks is also a long-time for a family to arrange their summer to host a pair of teens, a shorter period would adversely affect the teens' abilities to form true friendships and to get to know themselves. It's been my experience as a seventeen-time host that the teens can be courteous and friendly to one another for two weeks or more without really getting to know one another, but they can't do it for four weeks. By then they have had to open up to one another, have probably had to resolve disagreements, and to truly engage the other as a friend. So, CFP maintains the four-week period for hosting.

The whole purpose of hosting pairs of teens from divided communities is for them to get away from the forces that divide and to get to know members of the other community in a safe, neutral, different place and culture. In the early days of CFPNI, this was easy. While the purpose of hosting remains the same, the means of communication in the era of CFP is very different from that of CFPNI, when mailed postcards and letters were the only practical means of communication. There is now a vast array of low-cost electronic means of communication that connect people. These new means are how teens are accustomed to communicating and the main means that parents use to keep track of their children when they are not home. In order for CFP teens to get away and to focus on new friendships and ideas and for them to explore their identities away from the many events, concerns, and influences in Cyprus, it is necessary for them to have a complete break from all forms of electronic communications during the month that they are being hosted in the US, with the exception of a short weekly telephone or Skype call with their parents. These calls are intended to allow the parents to know that their children are safe and doing fine and for the teens to share a bit of their experiences before they return home at the end of the month.

In addition, the teen participants are to leave at home MP3, game players, and similar electronic devices, which can offer a way of escaping. Instead they should use the short time away to focus on their partner, their new friends, their new experiences, and themselves. This is an opportunity for them to think about who they want to be in the future, which may differ from how they have been defined in the past.

We recognize that this communications policy is a big change for the teens and for their parents. However, our experience over the years is that the teens adjust to the break and that, while a sacrifice, it is essential to achieve the goals of the program. Teens are requested to not participate in the program if they and their parents are not able and prepared to observe this policy. Similarly, host families are expected to make sure that this policy is being practiced by the teens they host.

These three practices and policies helped define CFPNI and were key ingredients in its success. Similarly, they help define CFP and are important to its ability to contribute to friendship, trust, understand, and peace in Cyprus.

This series of messages is intended to keep the Cyprus Friendship Program family around the world better informed about the activities of the program, to provide perspectives on its impacts, and to offer some reflections on its background and context. It is intended to supplement and not substitute for the semi-annual newsletter and other communications by the program.

Please share these messages with others. A compilation of the messages are archived on the CFP website (www.cyprusfriendship.org.)

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