

# Youth Action

## The World of ECA Youth Programs



Youth Programs Division  
Office of Citizen Exchanges  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
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### The “Father of Youth Programs” Retires



A well-known and respected figure in the Youth Programs Office of the State Department retired last month. Bob Persiko, a career diplomat and civil servant who devoted much of his career to youth exchanges, has moved to Germany with his wife, a German citizen, and his two sons.

Persiko joined the staff of the President's International Youth Exchange Initiative in 1983 and continued his involvement with youth programs until his retirement.

Persiko began his international career as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Peru, 1968-70. He became Chief of the Youth Programs Division in 1987.

His passion for and expertise in the field of youth exchange will be sorely missed by both his colleagues and the students whose lives he has touched over the years.

### Ben Franklin Transatlantic Fellows Reflect on their Stay in the U.S.

A year after completing their three-week Summer Institute for Youth program, Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellows reflected on their experience, describing how the program has affected their lives and relating what they have been doing over the past year.

Many students noted that the most important feature of the program was its ability to bring a diverse group from Europe, Eurasia and the U.S. together. Stated most eloquently by Ines Kavgic of Slovenia, the “one thing that [she cherishes] the most is the bond that has been established between the participants of BFTF program 2006. No matter how far apart we are, or how different our countries and political systems are, we have created something that I thought could not be created in a lifetime, let alone in three weeks.”

Others, including Jenny Pullicino Orlando of Malta, noted how the program shaped their career goals. Having originally planned to pursue a career as a lawyer, Jenny noted that “after being able to meet people from around the world it dawned on me that I’d rather spend my life building the bridges of global communication, diplomacy and sustainable peace.”



### Global Connections Empowers Young Women in Turkmenistan

Thirty-five Tech Age Girls semi-finalists in Turkmenistan created 16 websites about extraordinary female leaders who demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership despite the difficult cultural obstacles they had to overcome. Implemented through the Global Connections program, the Tech Age Girls project won global recognition as an initiative that allows young girls in Central Asia “to advance their technology skills, learn from successful female leaders in their communities, develop their own projects, and join the economy as skilled workers.”

### Fourteen Generations of FLEX Alumni meet with Senator Bill Bradley



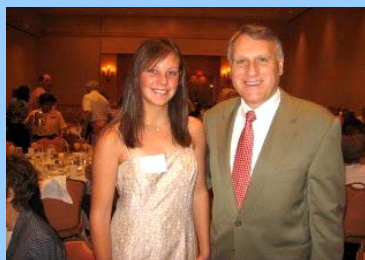
Former Senator Bill Bradley, who is acknowledged as the creator of the FLEX program, held a reception for fourteen generations of FLEX alumni on June 20<sup>th</sup> while visiting Moscow to commemorate 200 years of U.S./Russian diplomatic relations. Bradley fielded alumni questions and listened to students describe how their social and cultural views had changed as a result of the program, as well as how they had grown personally and professionally from the experience.

## ACYPL Exchange Promotes Diversity in Venezuela



Seven Venezuelan young political leaders, primarily from opposition parties, took away from their two-week visit to the U.S. a sense of the importance of discourse and freedom of expression in a healthy and functioning democracy. The delegates returned to Venezuela with fresh ideas, broadened horizons and renewed hope for the future of their country. The hospitality and openness that the seven delegates experienced during their trip served to build friendships that will continue to promote future cooperation between the U.S. and Venezuela. One delegate observed that “in the USA there truly exists a system of liberty in every sense of the word, and in particular of the freedom of expression.” Another noted that the program “enriched my knowledge of the North American people, and changed my perception on the system of life in America.”

## A-SMYLE Student Meets with U.S. Senator Kyl



Angela Culafic, A-SMYLE student from Montenegro living in Cottonwood, Arizona, for the 2006/07 school year, recently met Senator Jon Kyl (R-Arizona) and Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) at a Coffee Club Breakfast held in San Diego. The breakfast was a chance for students to meet their representatives and learn about national policy-making. Senator Kyl spoke on immigration and Senator Collins spoke on homeland security and home-grown terrorists.

## Departing YES Students Attend Reception on Capitol Hill

Marking the end of what has been an exciting year, over 200 participants in the YES program attended a reception hosted by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) Wednesday, June 13<sup>th</sup> on Capitol Hill.

Reflecting on their experience in the U.S., two of the participants presented inspiring speeches; relating lessons learned while abroad as well as describing their goals and ambitions for the future.

A Lebanese student reflected on her experience of being a cultural envoy to the United States; stating that, to the people she met while in the U.S., “[she] was Lebanon”. In addition to touching the lives of those she met in the U.S., she was impressed by the amount of trust Americans of opposing political views share with one another, stating that she “will try to convey this message [of trust] in Lebanon.”

A student from Pakistan, who stayed with a family who had recently lost a son in the Iraq war and whose host grandfather was an Iranian immigrant, spoke about the ability to express one’s own identity in the United States as a Pakistani-American or a Chinese-American, etc., which, he said “is very rare in other parts of the world.” He challenged his fellow YES alumni to continue with their responsibility to “make a difference and put [their] leadership in action” upon returning home.

Senator Kennedy noted that he hopes the YES students will continue to educate Americans about their respective countries; While Senator Lugar asked the students to keep in touch and suggested that they send letters to his office as would his constituents.

### Additional Sources of Information for Youth Program Participants:

- State Department Alumni site: [alumni.state.gov](http://alumni.state.gov)
- Greetings from America, a radio program that shares the experiences of foreign nationals studying in the US with their home countries [www.greetingsfromamerica.org](http://www.greetingsfromamerica.org)
- FLEX Alumni info from American Councils [www.americancouncils.org/info\\_by\\_audience.asp?PageID=43&AudienceType=9](http://www.americancouncils.org/info_by_audience.asp?PageID=43&AudienceType=9)
- Amideast YES Alumni Newsletters – alumni in NEA countries [www.amideast.org/programs\\_services/exchange\\_programs/yes/newsletter/may\\_06/default.htm](http://www.amideast.org/programs_services/exchange_programs/yes/newsletter/may_06/default.htm)
- Afghan YES students’ essays of their lives in Afghanistan and the US in the student voices section of News Hour Extra online site [www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth\\_coverage/asia/afghanistan](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/asia/afghanistan)