



THE JOURNEY OF CATHY W.

Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange
High School Alumna, 1984-1985
Senior Director, International Standards, Microsoft

Cathy's CBYX experience sparked a passion and provided skills that she uses to lead international tech teams.

Cathy grew up outside of Seattle, exploring the world through hiking paths, atlases and encyclopedias. She was interested in studying German and the politics of the Cold War. Her high school German teacher told her about the new CBYX program.

On the CBYX exchange, Cathy was challenged by her high school classes in Germany, which required her to develop self-discipline and a strong work ethic.

Cathy also gained respect for cultural differences, which helped her navigate diverse teams in future jobs.

After returning home, Cathy was motivated to study other languages and cultures. She set a new goal to obtain an undergraduate degree in foreign languages.

She pursued a doctorate degree and interned with Microsoft, where she used her knowledge of linguistics to develop processes to share information between computers. Though it was out of her comfort zone, she saw how working in the emerging technology field would allow her to apply her skills to impact millions of people.

For the past three decades, Cathy built her expertise and worked with governments, industry leaders, and civil societies from the U.S. to Europe and Asia to shape tech policy and global tech engineering.

Going to school in a second language and [with a host family, you are] learning there are many different ways to do things. You can't put a value judgment on them. It's neither good or bad, just different.

I wouldn't have pushed myself as hard in terms of taking risks [if I had not done CBYX]. It's a big leap when you're 17 years old to get on a plane and travel thousands of miles and live with a family you don't know... It let me think, 'Aim higher, set the bar higher.'

I've been really fortunate to work with global teams most of my career [and] there's many ways to communicate, negotiate, come to decisions...As Americans we're always compelled when we have conversations to fill the space. And I manage a team that sits in Asia and they need some time to sit and reflect, especially since they're working in their second language. You have to have a more inclusive communication space. A lot of the skills I use to manage my team, I learned in Germany.