



June 3, 2020

Dear FRIENDS FIRST Community,

I want to stand before you today and acknowledge that this year so far has not turned out how any of us expected and has tested the human spirit, often beyond the breaking point.

Over the last week our news cycles and social media feeds have been dominated with visuals and conversations of hate, love, anger, support, division, inclusion and a million other emotions that are difficult and inspiring. While this is a “hot topic” right now, it is a crisis that has been going on for far too long and we must take a stand now to listen, learn and love so that five, 10, 20 years from now I am not sending out this same message about injustice, racial inequity and broken systems. The unjust killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, David Dorn, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others is unacceptable. I am sad, angry and tired but I am passionate, bold and ready for us to come together as an organization and take action.

At the core of our organization, it is our mission to educate and mentor youth. Over the years we have had to address too many times in this country; school shootings or acts of terror and violence. But this feels different. We are still facing centuries old conversations and injustices of people’s right to live, to have dignity, to feel safe or heard or seen just because of who they are and the color of their skin. This is unacceptable. We have to be better not just for the youth and communities we serve but for all communities and youth across America. They deserve the opportunity for these difficult discussions take place. They deserve to know that we stand with them and are here to listen and support them in whatever they are feeling.

We are taking this as an opportunity for our organization to live out what MentorLife® really means on a large scale. We have committed this next academic year to find intentional ways to create opportunities within our programming and events to continue this conversation and find solutions. We need to stand not just in our words but in our actions! We have to create a platform for change that is beyond this moment. I also want to encourage you to take a moment to read a [statement](#) from our partner, National Mentor, on racial violence.

If you are in anyway in agreement with this statement, please start by sharing this message within your circle of influence. Seek ways to learn, listen and love. As a global citizen, an American and a human being, the time is NOW. We all must do something to help heal a long history of racism, discrimination and inequities. Become someone who says never again, not on my watch!

Respectfully Yours,
Elycia Cook
President & CEO



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We educate and mentor teens to make positive life choices and develop healthy relationships