

# Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – January 2025

**Equity** – Treating everyone fairly, having equal opportunities and removing barriers.

**Diversity** – The way we are all different.

**Inclusion** – Creating space for everyone where differences are embraced.

## Caring for Everyone’s Mental Health and Wellbeing

As we start to kick off the 2025 robotic season, we would like to reiterate the importance of personal health and well-being.

Mental health is a person’s psychological, emotional, and social well-being encompassing how one acts, thinks, and feels in responses to life’s many experiences. It is something that varies from person to person and can be influenced by genetics, life events, environments, and social norms. Stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders are among the most well-known mental illnesses and affect thousands of teens and adults nationwide.

The scary truth is that we sometimes don’t realize that someone is struggling with a mental illness until it is too late. If you or someone you know shows any reason for concern, speak to a mentor or trusted adult. Be mindful of your peers, show patience and practice acceptance and understanding. Always make others feel welcomed and appreciated for their efforts on the team, demonstrating *Gracious Professionalism*® each step of the way. Most importantly, allow yourself some grace, recognize your personal boundaries/limitations and create a ‘toolbox’ of positive coping skills that can act as a temporary distraction from daily stressors.

As a mentor, it is important to be available to communicate with students and mentors who may need support. Create a safe space of belonging for everyone, and lastly, be the support system that your teammates need.

If needed, resources are always available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (365 days a year).

988 Lifeline (Online chat, phone, or text options available)

Teen Line: Call 800-852-8336 or text TEEN to 839863

Crisis Text Line: Text TALK to 741741

Lori Deschene once said “You don’t have to be positive all the time. It’s perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared, or anxious. Having feelings doesn’t make you a ‘negative person.’ It makes you human”. We are all unique humans, humans that are not to be defined by their illness or disability.

Check out last month’s webinar titled *Caring for Everyone’s Mental Health and Well-being* for more information, ideas, and resources.

***How do you and your team make members, coaches and mentors feel they belong? Do you have tips for other teams on how to include people and help them feel they really belong?***

Send them to [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

## From *FIRST*: Just in case you missed it! – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Impact Report 2024

### ***FIRST*® exists to prepare the young people of today for the world of tomorrow.**

The mission of *FIRST*® is to provide life-changing robotics programs that give young people the skills, confidence, and resilience to build a better world. *FIRST* is actively engaged in developing strategies, collaborations, grants, scholarships, and initiatives that remove barriers and ensure greater access to *FIRST* programs for all youth to participate. Our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) strategy is grounded in the *FIRST* Core Value of Inclusion such that our programs welcome all. To globally engage our community, in FY24 (July 2023 - June 2024) our strategy prioritizes equity, diversity, and inclusion implementation across all *FIRST* programs.

Read the full report here: [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Impact Report 2024](#)

### **January Holidays and Events:**

#### **January is National Mentoring Month!**

During National Mentoring Month, we are all encouraged to raise awareness “for how one conversation, one experience and one mentor can change a young person’s life,” according to Mentor, a nonprofit that is “connecting and fueling opportunity for young people everywhere they are from schools to workplaces and beyond.””

**January 1** - New Year’s Day: The first day in the Gregorian calendar celebrated by most Western countries.

**January 1** – Emancipation Proclamation: President Lincoln declared all individuals held in slavery free on this day in 1863

**January 4** – Louis Braille’s birthday: he was a French educator who created a reading and writing system known as “braille” for the visually impaired

**January 6** – Feast of the Epiphany: this Christian feast day celebrates the star leading the three wise men to baby Jesus closing the Christmas season

**January 7** - Orthodox Christmas Day: A special day when many Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

**January 11** - National Human Trafficking Awareness Day: To raise awareness of human trafficking, people are asked to take photos of themselves, friends, family, and colleagues wearing blue clothing and share them on social media, along with the #WearBlueDay hashtag

**January 14** - Mahayana New Year: The day that Mahayana Buddhists celebrate the new year.

**January 14** - Orthodox New Year: Also known as the Julian New Year, it’s a time for Eastern Orthodox communities to celebrate the start of their new year.

**January 14** – Makar Sankranti: Hindu festival dedicated to the god of the sun, Surya

**January 19** – Timkat: A holiday observed by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians who celebrate the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River on Epiphany.

**January 20** – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day: celebrates one of the best-known civil rights activists, MLK Jr.

**January 27** – International Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust: a United Nations holiday that remembers the approximately 6 million Jews murdered during World War II

If you spot an error in the newsletter, please email us at: [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

## Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: LGBTQ+ People in STEM - Audrey Tang – Computer Scientist



Tang made a name as an open-source hacker, dedicated to the principles of democratic governance and transparent working practices. In 2014 Tang supported the Sunflower Protests, creating a hacking method so that protest videos could be shared across Taiwan. Instead of treating these hacking practices as a threat, the Taiwanese Government gave Tang a job.

Joining the ministry at the age of 36, as a Minister without Portfolio (they aren't connected to a single department as their skills can be applied to all areas of the government) Tang's projects include a radical education program teaching young people how to recognize fake news.

Most recently, Tang is credited with "hacking the Coronavirus", as a wave of panic buying swept the country and depleted stocks of face masks. Early in the coronavirus crisis, civic-minded programmers set up crowdsourced maps showing where masks were available for purchase. The "Mask Map" went viral with the public feeding in minute-by-minute information directing those in need to the shops with the most resources. Seeing the success of the map version 1, Tang jumped into action. With Tang's support, the "Mask Map" grew into a government supported program, open to the public, using information from the Taiwanese National Health Service to provide accurate and reliable information.

## ED&I and YPP Training: *Blue Campaign – One Voice. One Mission. End Human Trafficking*

Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide – including right here in the United States. It can happen in any community and victims can be any age, race, gender, or nationality. This two-part training will help everyone connected with youth programs learn to recognize and respond to suspected youth human trafficking.

Youth Professional and Caretaker Training: [Lesson 1](#)

The *FIRST* NC ED&I Team: Contact us at: [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

We are a team of coaches/mentors who want to help create a community and culture of people who embrace the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, who want to develop themselves, and who understand that growth and diversity of all types lead to team excellence.

*Anisha Patel (she/her) - The Pitt Pirates 2642*

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All Editions are Available Online at: <https://www.firstnorthcarolina.org/belonging-newsletter>