



## **ITOJU MENTORING HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM LAIDLAW FOUNDATION**

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We're excited to share that we've received a three-year grant from the Laidlaw Foundation, allowing us to continue supporting Black African international students through comprehensive mentoring, resourcing, and community-building initiatives. Laidlaw Foundation's Youth Action Fund (YAF) provides funding to grassroots initiatives that work with young people who are underserved by the education system and overrepresented in the criminal justice and child welfare systems.

For many international students, the journey to Canada is filled with excitement, and also anxiety, challenges, and an overwhelming sense of isolation. Often arriving at a young age, international students leave their home countries to pursue education and career opportunities, but have limited access to support as they adjust to a new environment. Black African international students often face additional barriers of anti-Black and systemic racism, which can impact academic success, mental health, integration, and sense of belonging. While transition support for international students is primarily expected to come from educational institutions, the assumption that institutions can meet unique student needs without adequate resources is flawed, leading to under-resourcing and further isolation. Reflecting on our experiences as former international students, we felt firsthand the lack of support and the isolation often felt despite our contributions to Canada's academic system and economy. As a result, we see the importance in supplementing institutional support through community-led initiatives and programming.

Itoju was born out of a collective awareness of this gap in intersectional support for African international students. Our mission is to bridge this gap by providing a supportive community and a "softer" landing in Canada for International students. We pair students with mentors with firsthand experience as African international students in Canada, offering mentees valuable insights into navigating life and academia in Canada. Mentors provide not only academic guidance but also culturally relevant support that considers the intersectional needs of Black African International students.



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Through personalized mentorship, peer support, and community gatherings, we foster belonging and equip students with the tools they need to thrive both academically and personally. Itoju will guide mentees as they navigate the "hidden curriculum"—the unspoken rules and expectations within educational institutions that often leave marginalized students at a disadvantage. By centering their experiences and leveraging an asset model, we will support African international students to leverage their skills, enhance confidence and strengthen their networks.

Through this funding, we'll be able to support students over three years by facilitating one-on-one mentoring, providing financial assistance to mentees, hosting virtual learning sessions, conducting extensive outreach, developing program resources, organizing yearly networking events for international students in Ontario, and working with international students while compensating them for their contributions, as we build Itoju. Ultimately, through our program learnings, we'll advocate for systemic changes to improve the experiences of Black African international students in Canada.

We are really excited for this journey. If you are interested in getting involved or supporting the Itoju mentoring program as a prospective mentor, mentee, partner, collaborator, or volunteer, let us know by emailing us at [\*\*admin@itojumentoring.org\*\*](mailto:admin@itojumentoring.org). Join us as we build a supportive community for International students in Canada

A special thanks to the Laidlaw foundation for funding this project.