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Supporting the Next Generation of Black Youth

Calgary Black Chambers provides scholarships that help build better futures

By Déjà Leonard • Photography by Erin Brooke Burns

According to City of Calgary data, 3.5 per cent of Calgarians self-identify as Black. Because Calgary's Black population is relatively small, it can be challenging to develop a strong sense of community. That's why the Calgary Black Chambers (CBC) works to create a unified, thriving local Black community.

CBC is a not-for-profit organization that looks to increase the leadership capacity of Black individuals by uplifting and supporting them in the community through volunteering, scholarships and more.

CBC operates under four main pillars: fellowship, mentorship, scholarship and advocacy. Recently, CBC has increased its efforts in providing scholarships to Black youth in Calgary, recognizing education is key to building strong and resilient communities.

The idea for the scholarships started during the pandemic, when CBC began collecting and redistributing funds, food and gift cards to people in the community who needed them most.

To formalize a scholarship program for Black youth, the Calgary Black Chambers Scholarship Fund

was established at Calgary Foundation in late 2020.

“The goal is to provide scholarships so that finances will not be an issue for Black youth to progress, allowing them to focus more on studying because we find a lot of our Black youth are working part-time while going to school,” says CBC co-founder and president, Chi Iliya-Ndule.

Statistics Canada data shows that while Black youth in Canada are as likely to graduate from high school as their peers, they are less likely to complete post-secondary education.

“We find that sometimes Black youth self-select out of scholarship applications because they think they're not going to get it,” Iliya-Ndule says.

By creating student awards specifically for Black youth, CBC supports students directly, removing barriers and encouraging and empowering Black youth as they work toward their goals. This year, the scholarship fund provided 20 awards, totaling \$85,000 in funding for students.

The student awards are primarily supported through donations by Calgary corporations, organizations and individuals, and are awarded based on academic achievement, financial need, leadership and community

contributions in alignment with CBC's core values.

“We can help change the narrative and make the city more equitable — and be the best place for Black individuals to settle in Canada when they arrive,” says CBC co-founder and treasurer, Michael Lee Hing.

Iliya-Ndule and Lee Hing enjoy hearing about the impact of the scholarships via letters that award recipients send sharing their gratitude, and how the scholarships help to alleviate financial barriers and stress as students pursue their academic interests and career goals.

CBC aims to make Calgary a city where everyone can thrive. Its mentorship program is open to all youth and enables young people to connect with relevant professionals to learn and grow their skills before moving on to post-secondary education.

Lee Hing says this positive momentum helps create a better future for more people. “I would love for these students to, down the road, turn around and do the same thing. Get involved with community organizations and just help any way they can, whether it's financial or giving time.” ■

Learn more at calgaryblackchambers.ca.