

# COLLEGE STUDENT BASIC NEEDS PROGRAM

## DESCRIPTION

(May 2023)

The College Student Basic Needs Program (CSBNP) helps under-resourced college students experiencing food and housing insecurity and lacking other resources to meet basic needs to stay in school, succeed academically, graduate and obtain better paying employment. A significant portion of the students we assist are people of color and/or represent a diverse array of other demographic groups. Many commute to school and hold down low-paying jobs. Our programs benefit two generations in the case of many students who are parents.

### Our Consortium

Our seven CSBNP consortium members provide a difficult-to-replicate array of food, housing, non-profit business, governance and other types of advice and services needed to serve our under-resourced students: *Core Members:* Montgomery County Community College (MC3), a 2-year junior college, <https://www.mc3.edu/choosing-montco/student-experience> operates a wellness center with two food pantries for students at its Blue Bell and Pottstown campuses; Gwynedd Mercy University (GMercyU), a 4-year university, <https://www.gmercyu.edu/student-life/campus-resources/health-resources/> operates Catherine's Cupboard, in a dedicated building on its Gwynedd Valley campus; Manna on Main Street (Manna), <https://mannaonmain.org/> operates a full-service food pantry in Lansdale, PA which delivers food remotely ordered on-line by students to the Blue Bell and Gwynedd Valley campuses; and Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities (PCRC), <https://www.pottstowncluster.org/> provides remotely ordered food for students on the Pottstown campus; *Supporting Members:* Family Promise Montco, <https://www.fpmontco.org/> provides housing and food pantry services; Montco Anti-Hunger Network (MAHN) <https://www.montcoantihunger.org/> is a network of County food pantries; and Your Way Home Montgomery County, <https://yourwayhome.org/> is a public/private housing organization. Fiscal intermediary services are provided by Tri-County Network (TCN), <https://tcnetwork.org/>.

For information about how CSBNP was developed, please see the following:

Guest Blog, **“Launching a Program for Food and Housing Insecure College Students: A Step-by-Step Approach”**, School House Connection (March 15, 2022), <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/launching-a-program-for-food-and-housing-insecure-college-students-a-step-by-step-approach/>.

### The Problem

In the past 30+ years, the average in-state net price for a full-time undergraduate student at a public four-year college nearly doubled, from approximately \$8,000 in 1990-91 to \$15,000 in 2017-18; and the net price at two-year, public institutions rose from approximately \$6,800 to

\$8,000 (GAO 2018 Food Insecurity Report). These costs are very challenging for students from low-income households who are more likely to experience housing and food insecurities that impede academic performance, persistence and ultimately graduation and employment opportunities.

### The Need

The 2018 report by Temple University’s Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, summarizing findings from a 123-institution survey with 86,000 student respondents, found food insecurity rates of 48% and 41% at two-year and four-year institutions, respectively, utilizing the USDA 18-item question set; 50% of 2-year respondents and 44% of 4-year respondents, respectively, worried about running out of food with nearly half of students reporting that they could not afford to eat balanced meals. Similarly, 60% and 48% at 2-year and 4-year institutions, respectively, reported experiencing housing insecurity in the past 12 months, with homelessness rates of 18% and 14%, respectively.

MC3 and GMercyU participated in Temple’s Hope Center’s 2018-19 study which found:

University	Surveys Sent	Surveys Completed	Survey Response Rate	Food Insecurity Rate	Housing Insecurity Rate	Homelessness Rate	At Least One Form of Basic Needs Insecurity	Food & Housing Insecure	Housing Insecure & Homeless	Food Insecure & Homeless	Food Insecure Students on SNAP	Homeless Students w/Housing Benefits
<b>MC3</b>	<b>10,400</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>6.10%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<i>National</i>			<i>5.80%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>18%</i>						
<b>GMercyU</b>	<b>2,800</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>13.90%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<i>National</i>				<i>41%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>14%</i>						

A MC3 2020 study found:

"Of the 1,068 student respondents, 5% indicated that during the past 12 months they had been homeless, couch surfing, living in a shelter, living out of their car, and/or living with someone else temporarily because they had no place else to stay. Several students also indicated ... that though they had a home they were behind on rent and/or threatened with eviction. Additionally, 6% of respondents indicated that they did not feel safe in their living situation during the past 12 months and 9% worried during the past year that they would not have a place to sleep. As with food challenges, in the area of housing challenges minority students were disproportionately affected."

A Fall 2020 GMercyU Survey found:

- 36.4% (27 out of 74) of survey respondents expressed concerns related to food and/or housing insecurity;
- 21.6% (16 out of 74) of survey respondents expressed concerns related to food insecurity; and
- 14.8% (11 out of 74) of survey respondents expressed concerns related to housing insecurity.

For even more current information, see **Charlotte West, “A Matter of Basics”, ABG Trusteeship magazine (Nov-Dec 2022)**, <https://agb.org/trusteeship-article/a-matter-of-basics/>, for more background. This article, which features CSBNP, points out that “(s)tudents of color were disproportionately impacted by these issues...,” and that the pandemic made the need more acute.

The directors of MC3’s Wellness Center and GMercyU’s Catherine’s Cupboard food pantry see students with these needs daily. Here’s how a 2018 focus group participant put it:

“I’m a foreigner. I don’t have a family paying for me; I came here by myself. I have a child so I was working full-time; but when I started going to school ... I had to drop down some hours. So, now my rent is more than what I make a month.... So, what are you going to have to cut down to pay what is important to you? Sometimes it’s food, sometimes utilities, sometimes it’s gas... Because you want to make something of yourself, so you struggle.”

### **Our Students**

Our premise is the well-established notion that post-secondary education of low-income students is a pathway to higher paying jobs that will break the cycle of poverty they experience and over time help create intergenerational wealth. Our surveys and experience show that it’s incredibly hard for students to study, attend classes, hold down jobs and succeed academically when they have no place to live, inadequate housing and/or inadequate, non-nutritious food. MC3 prepares graduates with opportunities for better paying jobs and/or transfers to 4-year colleges like GMercyU which is well-known for its nursing, other health care and education undergraduate and graduate programs, with 97% of recent graduates obtaining employment or going on to graduate school within 6 months of graduation. This is particular true for the growing number of parent students where better paying jobs help two generations, parents and children alike.

Our housing and food programs seek to address inequities in the food system. A large percentage of students we impact are Black, Brown, and other People of Color negatively impacted by poverty. We need to understand in depth how inequity and systemic racism impact their lives and address those impacts in the programs we develop. Equality insists that everyone be treated equally – a credible starting point. Equity, on the other hand, and our programs in particular, are about providing students with the resources they need to be on an equal footing with other students. They are inclusive, honoring and respecting all participating students regardless of background, training or starting ability. This also means engaging with our students in meaningful ways to be certain that our programs are truly responsive to their needs.

With this in mind, our Racial and Social Charter, adopted in July 2021, provides a framework for incorporating essential and comprehensive racial equity elements into the design and implementation of programs developed. Our overall goal is to "create a sustainable culture of

diversity, equity and inclusion that permeates every aspect of what we do and how we do it." The Charter recognizes that, in addition to racial equity: "[T]here will no doubt be other important gender, health disparity and other social justice issues which impact the college students supported by our programs that will also need to be addressed. Accordingly, a broader 'social' justice perspective will be kept in mind as our initiatives proceed."

A substantial portion of students accessing our remote ordering food program thus far represent a diverse array of demographic groups.

Students applying for our affordable housing scholarships (described below) are personally interviewed and must meet one of the following criteria: eligible for a Pell grant or other type of educational scholarship, loan or other assistance; individual or family income at or below applicable governmental standards for housing, medical, food or any other type of government assistance; member of an underserved community (i.e., communities or geographic groups that have been systemically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civil life, including in particular people of color, immigrants and English-learners (includes populations or communities that have experienced long-standing disparities that were amplified by the pandemic, or who face continued barriers to a full and equitable recovery; and historically marginalized communities who have been adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality); or member of a community or demographic group that has been caused severe impacts by the Pandemic (includes low-income households, households residing in a Qualified Census Tract, households that qualify for government benefit programs).

Our research surveys and focus groups are being designed to provide input from people of color, Immigrant status, ESL, LGBTQ+, Age, Student with Families and Dependents and Student Athletes who are using our programs.

Our HUB Website initiative, funded in part by a VNA "inclusion grant", is specifically oriented towards students of color, immigrants and students who speak English as a second language. The Website will have multiple language choices and be developed with significant student input on design, usability and sensitivity to racial and social equity and ethnic factors. Message Agency, our website vendor, was selected in a competitive process using weighted criteria that included a diversity, equity and inclusion factor.

## **Our Programs**

Program details follow:

- By the end of the Spring Semester 2023 we had met our goal of at least 100 students using on-line software to order nutritious food delivered to campus food pantries from Manna & PCRC;
- An Affordable Housing Scholarship (AHS) Fund, seeded through \$45,000 Home4Good (H4G) and \$5,000 church grants, is operational with several grants made to students

facing eviction or in need of emergency assistance, many of whom would have dropped out without this assistance.

- An event celebrating this new program is featured here:

**Montgomery County institutions receive \$45,000 to address hunger, homelessness  
Funding part of \$3.95 million Home4Good statewide initiative**

<https://www.thereporteronline.com/2022/03/25/montgomery-county-institutions-receive-45k-to-address-hunger-homelessness/>.

- We are working with Message Agency during 2023 to construct the HUB Website prototype for students to readily access community-based basic needs resources (then, during 2024, we hope to populate it with content on vetted resources available across the County with work study assistance from student program participants);
- We have seeded a new emergency fund (modeled after our AHS Fund program) to provide direct cash support for a variety of immediate non-housing needs; and
- By the end of 2023 we plan to begin to implement at least one residential housing option for students with families and a reduced dormitory cost program.

Our \$250K ARPA grant has helped us extend these programs through 2024 and hire a full-time executive director by 4Q23.

### **Student Stories**

Here are three stories to illustrate how our programs help:

- *The young lady was about to start her 2022 fall semester at MC3, assisted through a Pell grant, financial aid, food resources and enrollment in public benefits. She was on her own, having grown up in foster care and diagnosed with a disability. About to start a new job, she was short on cash to pay her August rent, with late fees looming. Without help, she would face eviction, jeopardizing her ability to hold down her new job and stay in school. Fortunately, she qualified for a \$2,250 affordable housing scholarship from the Fund. She avoided eviction, started her job and was able to continue her education at the Community College.*
- *A GMercyU student set to graduate in May 2023 needed one more credit to graduate. In arranging with faculty to take that course over the summer, it was discovered that she had been living in her car over the spring semester after a breakup with her partner with whom she had been living. It was arranged for the student to live in a dorm on campus over the summer. This was made possible through the reduced cost dormitory cost model developed by CSBNP supplemented by a housing scholarship to supplement what the student could afford to pay and enhanced by the student participating in our remote ordering food program.*

- *An honor roll student, who grew up in foster care, works 25 to 35 hrs. per week at Home Depot, identifies as LBBTQ+ and is enrolled at MC3 for summer and fall 2023, was faced with homelessness when her mother, with whom she was living, decided to sell her house in Pottstown where the student resides and move to Florida. The mother agreed to wait to sell the house if the student would pick up the mortgage payments. The student, who receives SNAP benefits, two grants (one a Pell) and participates in our remote ordering food program, received a housing scholarship grant to help with the mortgage payments so she can stay in school and complete her course work.*

## **Our Management**

Our Core Team includes: Betsy Stone Plummer - CSBNP Co-Project Coordinator (Director of Service & Catherine's Cupboard, GMercyU); Nichole Kang, PhD - CSBNP Co-Project Coordinator (Director, Wellness Center, MC3); Suzan Neiger Gould - Executive Director, Manna; Anissa Jones - Director of Operations, PCRC; Vicki Giammarco - Director of Grants, MC3; Holly Parker - Executive Director, TCN; and John Kepner - Senior Project Advisor, a retired health care executive, consultant and attorney, <https://www.fenwaymanagementadvisors.org/what-we-do-5>.

Our consortium cooperates under a Memorandum of Understanding which specifies the ground rules for how the CSBNP is governed and operated. The Core Team, which meets monthly, develops strategy, oversees operations, approves policies and major initiatives and approves our project budget.

Day-to-day operations are managed by a senior project advisor, Mr. Kepner, who works closely with Ms. Plummer and Dr. Kang who respectively manage MC3's Wellness Center (food pantry and counseling services) and GMercyU's Catherine's Cupboard (food pantry).

Grant administration and other financial responsibilities have been assigned to TCN under a fiscal intermediary agreement.

Our Affordable Housing Scholarship Fund is operated through a policy approved by the Core Team. Applicants are required to file an application. MC3 and GMercyU each have an internal group which reviews applications and makes recommendations for rental assistance and other emergency housing awards to students who qualify under the policy. Final approval is then required from Ms. Plummer, Dr. Kang and Mr. Kepner and approved awards are paid by TCN.

## **Outcomes Research**

We are also developing survey tools and focus groups for research to address how students who participate in our programs are being impacted. We are finalizing the student survey tool, arranging for IRB approvals and have retained a consultant to conduct the focus groups. Our goal is to implement the first survey and first focus groups at MC3 and GMercyU this Spring 2023 semester and then each semester through Spring 2024 semester.

## **Sustainability**

Our substantial ARPA funding will allow us to continue our programs for two academic years ending spring 2024. Building upon our success thus far, our 2023 program budget and planning call for additional fundraising during 2023, from a much broader range of foundations and other sources, sufficient to enable us to hire a full-time executive director by the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023 and support staff during 2024 to continue our programs.

We are gratified at the incredible support we have received since inception from the following diversified funders who have recognized the needs our programs address and provided insightful advice: Montgomery County (American Rescue Plan Act) - \$250,000 (unrestricted); Montgomery County (Montco Strong) - \$10,000 (unrestricted); VNA of Greater North Penn – \$57,500 (4 grants, including \$10,000 for initial research, \$15,000 unrestricted for operating support and \$32,500 restricted to HUB Website development); FHLB Home4Good - \$45,000 (AHS Fund); Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation - \$35,000 (2 grants, unrestricted); Health Spark Foundation – \$30,000 (unrestricted); Independence Foundation - \$10,000; St. Thomas' Church Outreach Fund - \$5,000 (AHS Fund); and Dolfinger-McMahon and Linback Foundations \$2,500 each (unrestricted).