**The Basics of Basic Needs -Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Episode 166**

00:00:01 **Pauline**

We're partnering with the Mountie Money Management Center and Lisa Amos in the center is organizing some workshops for students, including how to plan meals, how to plan meals on a budget, and so that's kind of in the works, and we are looking at partnering with Nutrition and Foods and possibly, Culinary Arts for some workshops for students as well.

00:00:25 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:26 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:30 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:47 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

00:00:51 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:56 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pomona. Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:03 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:01:05 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:12 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:15 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:17 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:29 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:34 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:41 **Sun**

Welcome back to the podcast. This is your host, Sun Ezzell. In today's episode, Pauline Swartz, Librarian and Basic Needs Committee Co-chair, and Rigo Estrada, Director of Basic Needs Resources join me to talk about Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week 2022.

00:01:55 **Sun**

Thanks for joining me to learn about basic needs of Mt. SAC students, updated information about what basic needs resources are available, and how you can help connect students with critical basic needs resources. Enjoy!

00:02:14 **Sun**

Welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. I am so excited to be here today with Pauline Swartz, Mt. SAC Librarian and Basic Needs Committee Co-chair, and Rigo Estrada, Director of Basic Needs Resources. Pauline and Rigo, welcome to the podcast.

00:02:29 **Rigo**

Thank you.

00:02:29 **Pauline**

Thank you.

00:02:30 **Sun**

Thank you so much for joining the podcast today to talk about Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week and resources, basic needs resources that are available at Mt. SAC. I was wondering as we were getting started, if you might introduce yourselves and share a little bit about how you got involved in basic needs work at Mt. SAC.

00:02:48 **Pauline**

Sure. I'm Pauline Swartz, and I'm a faculty member in the library department and the co-chair of the Basic Needs Committee. And one of the many roles libraries play in their communities is to welcome, support, and provide safe places for people, especially those who are experiencing basic needs challenges.

00:03:04 **Pauline**

And I joined the committee because I wanted to get involved with our campus community effort to support our students. So, I simply responded to the call for volunteers from the academic senate, and now, I'm going into my sixth year working with the committee on ways to support our students.

00:03:19 **Rigo**

Thank you. How I got involved with basic needs work at Mt. SAC, interestingly enough, I started at Mt. SAC as a program specialist for our REACH foster youth program back in 2007. And a big part of my role was to support our students within REACH and provide them support that would help them academically, and a lot of times, that included basic needs support, specifically CalFresh Outreach.

00:03:43 **Rigo**

So, I began doing basic needs work as a specialist, providing our REACH students with CalFresh Assistance and additional basic needs resources. And as the Basic Needs Committee started developing the food pantry and other basic needs efforts, I began as a volunteer joining the food pantry, also providing some CalFresh support. And when the Basic Needs Committee with the work of Koji Uesugi, our Dean of Student Services, when the program coordinator position became available, I went ahead and applied for that position as I saw it as something that I felt passionate about.

00:04:18 **Rigo**

And in 2019, when the program got established, I became the coordinator of the program and have been working within Basic Needs ever since.

00:04:28 **Sun**

Well, thank you both so much for all of the work that you're doing for our campus community. And I understand there's a big event coming up in November. Could you share a little bit about what is Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, and what are some things that are happening on campus?

00:04:44 **Pauline**

So, Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is an annual program where people come together to draw attention to problems related to hunger and homelessness. Many of the institutions that participate are institutions of higher education, and community organizations.

00:05:01 **Rigo**

Yeah, on that end, the Basic Needs Committee, which is on campus, the leading group around the Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week efforts brought this idea up to the committee to collaborate with their Basic Needs Resources Program, and a subcommittee developed within the Basic Needs Committee that worked to identify events, activities, and collaborations that we can create here on campus to bring that education awareness onto campus.

00:05:28 **Rigo**

So, some of the events that we will be having this academic school year, which will be in November 14th, I believe, Pauline?

00:05:37 **Pauline**

Yes.

00:05:39 **Rigo**

The week of November 14th, right before Thanksgiving, it's going to include workshops. One of the workshops that we'll be hosting is with a partnership with the Housing Rights Center out in Los Angeles. We'll be coming onto campus and doing an in-person workshop to help students, educate students and faculty and staff about renting 101; how to talk to landlords, how to engage with landlords, look at leases, and things of that nature.

00:06:06 **Rigo**

We will also be hosting in collaboration with POD a Basic Needs Allyship Program. The mission of these Basic Needs Allyship Program is to equip Mt. SAC staff and faculty with the proper tools and knowledge to help them serve, advocate for, and support students experiencing basic needs insecurities. Pauline, can you talk about the other programs we'll be hosting as well?

00:06:29 **Pauline**

So, some of the other things that we'll be doing for Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, we're going to have a cooking tool drive for about a month, so longer than the week. It's going to start October 17th and it's going to run through the end of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week.

00:06:46 **Pauline**

We have locations across campus and we'll sent out more information including a map of where you can drop off these cooking tools. Rigo surveyed students in the food pantry in Spring and asked the students what kind of tools they needed to prepare their meals. And so, the items we're asking for are based on what the students said they need.

00:07:07 **Pauline**

So, we'll be sending information with links to example tools that people can donate across campus that will run for a month. We're also going to have a library exhibit in the library kind of promoting the week, but also, providing information to students about the resources that are available.

00:07:24 **Pauline**

That will be up for the month of November. And some of the other workshops that we'll be having are for students. So, we're partnering with the Mountie Money Management Center, and Lisa Amos in the center is organizing some workshops for students including how to plan meals, how to plan meals on a budget. And so, that's kind of in the works.

00:07:46 **Pauline**

And we are looking at partnering with Nutrition and Foods and possibly, Culinary Arts for some workshops for students as well. There's going to be a cooking demo at Cares Corner. We're using the food from the pantry. And Rigo, did you already talk about the POD workshops?

00:08:02 **Rigo**

I did. I did, but I'm excited about the cooking demo. Thank you so much for bringing that one up. That's going to be an internal committee presentation that's going to be led by Barbara Carrillo who's part of our Basic Needs Committee.

00:08:14 **Rigo**

During her live cooking demo, we will also be providing CalFresh information so that while she's cooking and kind of preparing the food, which will be available at our food pantry as well. Folks from our CalFresh Outreach team will be presenting participants with additional information regarding CalFresh. Just go over some myths about CalFresh and help students know whether or not they're eligible.

00:08:39 **Sun**

It sounds really amazing and it also, sounds really important that you're asking students because we might not necessarily think right off the bat beyond, okay, here's the food that's available, but for folks who maybe don't have a lot of cooking experience or have the utensils or maybe haven't cooked the kind of food that they're picking up at the pantry, just picking up the groceries isn't the whole story.

00:09:02 **Sun**

So, that's really great that you're asking students and students have that opportunity to share. What kind of response are you getting? You mentioned the food pantry and you mentioned some different events, like how many students come to the different events when food is available or the workshops are available?

00:09:19 **Rigo**

That's a great question and I think it relates to the need. Just to provide some insight; last academic year, 2021 to 2022, we had a little over 2,600 students visit our food pantry a total of about 10,000 times throughout the academic year. That's quite a bit granted we are a large campus, but nonetheless, the need does exist.

00:09:42 **Rigo**

And a way you can look at the need is a lot of us look at Mt. SAC geographically located in the city of Walnut, a beautiful affluent community. Nonetheless, when we look at our student population, we realize that our students are not just students from Walnut. We have students from local working-class communities from Covina, El Monte, La Puente, Pomona - and these are your working-class communities. Where the medium income or medium household is anywhere between the low 50 , 000 to the high 70,000.

00:10:21 **Rigo**

And the need is there. We take a closer look at these student populations and look at, for example, the free and reduced meals from these communities. They're high. When we look at a city like El Monte where 92% of our K through 12 student population are receiving free or reduced meals. Think about that.

00:10:41 **Rigo**

As seniors are now graduating from these high schools and are now moving into college and are attending Mt. SAC, they're going from being able to receive a free breakfast and a free lunch to not having access or the opportunity for those meals. So, the food insecurity is definitely there.

00:10:58 **Rigo**

When we also look at data for basic needs, the Hope Center back in 2020 administered a basic needs survey. Our campus was part of that survey. Hopefully, many of you listening to this are already familiar with the Basic Needs survey, and if not, you can definitely find it on our website and we'll hopefully, share some links here too.

00:11:21 **Rigo**

But when we look at that report and what our Mt. SAC students stated, at Mt. SAC, about 35% of our students have food insecurity. And when they are asked these questions, they're asked about food insecurity within the time of the question and 30 days before. When you look at housing and homelessness, for example, 13% of our Mt. SAC students shared that they were homeless, literally homeless within that year of when they got asked that question.

00:11:50 **Rigo**

And then additional 47% of our student population has stated that they have encountered some type of housing insecurity within that year as well. And housing insecurity includes anything from having to move multiple times throughout that span of time because of high-rent, folks not being able to pay your utility bills or having to move with additional folks; five, eight people in a one-bedroom apartment.

00:12:16 **Rigo**

And these numbers, if you look at nationally and within two-year institutions are pretty aligned with the national basic needs and security of all our students. And the two-year institutions nationwide, the numbers were 39% foot insecurity, 52% housing insecurity, and 14%, homelessness. So, yes, the need is out there not just for Mt. SAC students, but overall, for college students.

00:12:43 **Sun**

Those percentages are really sobering. It makes me think, so I'm in class with my students and that means one in three students is experiencing food insecurity. That means more than one in 10 students in class might be experiencing housing insecurity.

00:12:58 **Sun**

So, a lot of faculty bring snacks to class, a lot of areas on campus, tutoring areas, and I think maybe the library as well, often have snacks for students. But in addition to that, can you talk a little bit about resources, basic needs resources on campus and how folks can help connect students to those basic needs resources on campus? Bringing snacks to class is great, but it might not be enough.

00:13:23 **Rigo**

Yeah, we've definitely heard that a lot. We actually, in relation to what you just mentioned, our newest service from our Basic Needs Resources Program is our Mountie Fresh Snack Rack Program where we understand the impact of these snacks and just access to quick healthy items.

00:13:41 **Rigo**

We have established a Snack Rack Program where we've partnered up with five locations on campus to provide them these snacks that we're able to do once a week. We understand that not all our students have access to our food pantry, for example, which I'll share some information about in a little bit.

00:14:01 **Rigo**

But these Snack Rack Programs that we have currently are located in the ASAC Tutoring Center. In non-credit, short vocational, we have one there with our EOPS Program within our Pride Center here on campus, in our Equity Center with our REACH foster youth program. And we have one within our Basic Needs Resources Center.

00:14:23 **Rigo**

And what these snack racks are, are kind of what they sound; two snack racks that we are able to stock once a week. Typically, they have granola bars, they have microwavable meals, trail mix and fruits and salads when available. And they also have educational information.

00:14:42 **Rigo**

The hope is that we're able to share with students additional basic needs information so that they can feel comfortable in whatever space they're in to reach out and request additional support if there are any long-term needs.

00:14:56 **Rigo**

But going back to the food pantry; our hope is that many of you listening to this are aware of our food pantry. We've made some changes this year. We are now open longer. We still have the current schedule of the second and fourth week of the month. Every Tuesday and Wednesday of those weeks, we're open from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM. On Fridays of those same weeks, we're open from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

00:15:20 **Rigo**

Our goal is to extend our access and allow students to visit our free grocery store and get any grocery items that they're in need of. We have some policies and procedures inside the food pantry to ensure that all our students have access. This food pantry service is here for active current Mt. SAC Students and ID is required. We prefer that our students have their Mt. SAC IDs.

00:15:46 **Rigo**

If they're not, we are able to welcome students with their A numbers as long as they have a photo ID that we can compare names with, again, to ensure that our students are accessing our foods and groceries and that we're being equitable with all our students.

00:16:01 **Rigo**

When we talk about additional resources beyond our food resources, we also talk about our case management. Within our Basic Needs Resources Program, we have a team of three professional case workers; two of which are professional social workers, and we have a team of five student employees that provide peer-to-peer case management support.

00:16:25 **Rigo**

Our goal with our case management is to ensure that we're looking at students holistically and we're providing them services related to their basic needs. We work with students, assess their situation, and connect them to the appropriate resources.

00:16:40 **Rigo**

Many times those resources include housing. One of the things that we want to make clear as we engage with our faculty and with our staff or anyone listening, is unfortunately, we do not have a housing placement service. We have a housing navigation service, and that's a big distinctive difference that we wanted to share.

00:17:01 **Rigo**

We are doing our best to ensure that our students are finding housing resources internally or externally in their communities, but we are unable to promise spaces or beds based on their situation. What we do is we assess their situation and connect them to the appropriate community resource in hopes that they are able to connect to those housing placements.

00:17:24 **Rigo**

We also provide CalFresh assistance support. When you talk about CalFresh, we're talking about the federally funded program that provides monthly benefits to eligible college students with electronic benefits transfer card, which is also known as an EBT card.

00:17:41 **Rigo**

And this allows students to purchase nutrition food. They can use this EBT card to purchase cold foods and grocery items, including snacks and drink. There are some restrictions, items such as hot foods and non-food items are not allowed, but we help students apply for CalFresh.

00:17:59 **Pauline**

And the cool thing about this CalFresh benefit is if students are provided the CalFresh benefit, they're able to use it on campus. We have partnered with Sodexo who is now accepting EBT at their Prime Stop convenience store in Building 61. So, you could go up to Building 61 into the convenience store and use your EBT card if you have that access.

00:18:22 **Sun**

That's great though that students are able to get the card and use it on campus. That makes a lot of sense. And it's also the kind of process that can take a while to work out, I'm sure.

00:18:32 **Rigo**

Exactly.

00:18:33 **Sun**

Well, thank you so much for sharing about all of those resources that are available. Do either of you have any suggestions for folks listening? What are some good ways to help connect students with those resources? I'm sure there are a variety of ways that students come to you and use those resources.

00:18:50 **Pauline**

So, one simple way that's pretty easy if you're a faculty member is to put a brief statement in your syllabus. So, I mean, you can write an elaborate statement if you'd like to or use something pretty simple. We have a ready-to-go syllabus statement in City Labs and I usually send out a copy when we send out emails about the Basic Needs Committee or events that we're having.

00:19:15 **Pauline**

So, I'll send the text out again. And there's also toolkits that you can use if you wanted to write your own. But even just linking to the Basic Needs Resources webpage on your syllabus with a short sentence can be really helpful. It reaches all of your students.

00:19:30 **Pauline**

Sometimes you don't know which students may need help, and so this is going to reach all of them in a very quick and easy way to reach everybody. So, a syllabus statement is something that I would recommend if you can fit it on your syllabus.

00:19:44 **Pauline**

But another way that a faculty could help connect students with resources is just to share announcements. So, not only just their syllabi, like to put the syllabus statement in there, but if there's an event happening or if they wanted to share information about the CalFresh Awareness Week, helping to promote it in their classes is helpful because what we've learned is that students get most of their information from their professors.

00:20:06 **Pauline**

Even though we send emails and we could put flyers up, it's really the most effective way to get information to students is through their professors and counselors and coaches. And so, that's really helpful when they share.

00:20:18 **Rigo**

Thank you Pauline. Earlier I was talking about the Allyship Program that we hope through our Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week series of events that we start doing this more consistently. My hope is as we have these opportunities, that you take the time to participate in this training and have an understanding of the work that we're doing, provide some support that you can utilize when engaging with students.

00:20:43 **Rigo**

The goal is not for you as a listener or staff or faculty to know exactly that every single service that we offer or to try to figure out the eligibility requirements for our students in need. It's learning how to direct them to our support and how to encourage students to seek that support.

00:21:04 **Rigo**

Our students when wanting to meet with our team can simply visit our website, basic needs - mtsac/basic\_needs, and we have a clear button - apply for assistance. This first step is going to allow a student for hours to schedule an appointment with our student navigators.

00:21:24 **Rigo**

In this process, they'll share a little bit more in detail about some of their barriers and some of their needs. And depending on that need, our student navigator will be able to connect the students with resources.

00:21:37 **Rigo**

If the student shares that they're experiencing immediate homelessness or they're currently homeless, or if they share that they are fleeing domestic violence or a combination of these complex situations that are real for our students - our student navigator will immediately escalate that case to our social workers so that they can provide that comprehensive professional support.

00:21:59 **Rigo**

I recommend everyone to visit our website, explore our website, which also has our resources and has links to additional community resources to encourage students to seek out services.

00:22:11 **Sun**

That's great. Thank you both so much. And we can include those links in the show notes so they're easily accessible for folks. You've shared so many ways that folks can get involved and support students and help connect students with resources, is there anything else you wanted to share about how folks can support and get involved in the work that you are doing?

00:22:31 **Rigo**

No, that's a great question. We're currently in the process of creating a volunteer system so that folks on campus can volunteer at our food pantry. It will include a required volunteer orientation. Our hopes are to establish this by the beginning of the Spring semester.

00:22:50 **Rigo**

So, our hopes are that by Spring 2023, folks that are interested in volunteering at our food pantry can do so by requesting to participate in our volunteer orientation. As we get this program off the ground and running, we'll make sure to market and share information with our campus community.

00:23:11 **Rigo**

If you are someone who's listening and would like to learn more about our basic needs resources and the needs of our students, again, I welcome you to visit our website. In our website, we have linked to the research, discussed these needs.

00:23:25 **Rigo**

There's also a link to our foundation account where folks can donate financial support to help us, whether it's with providing students with the emergency Visa cards, whether it's buying additional food or hygiene items. We do have a partnership with Foundation where we're able to accept donation to continue the work that we're doing.

00:23:48 **Sun**

That's great. Thank you so much.

00:23:51 **Pauline**

Can I add that Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is an annual event and we like to do it every year that we can. We had a little bit of a hiccup with COVID, but now, we're back. And so, as you are planning your fall schedules, if you'd like to collaborate on any programming, workshops, anything next fall, I'm sure there'll be opportunities for that collaboration. Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is usually the third week of November. That helps to plan.

00:24:20 **Sun**

That's great. Thank you both so much. I feel like you shared so much information. You're working so hard to support students, there's a lot going on. I just want to check and make sure, did you get to share everything that you were hoping to share?

00:24:34 **Pauline**

Can I just share that this is my last year on the committee and it is an awesome group of people. We do really important work. It's been one of the most meaningful experiences I've had in a working environment. So, for faculty, please look for that email you're going to see from Academic Senate a few months from now that's going to have a call for volunteers because there will be a seat open and consider serving on this committee.

00:24:58 **Sun**

Thank you for all your work on the committee, Pauline. One of the lovely things about committee work like this obviously, is helping to support students and also, being able to work with colleagues across campus that we might not otherwise have an opportunity to work with. So, you all have been such a great team.

00:25:15 **Rigo**

Thank you. On that end, I do want to do a selfish plug and give a shout-out to our Basic Needs Team. All the way from the top from our VP, Student Services, Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji, to our Dean of Student Services, Dr. Koji Uesugi, they've been great champions and have allowed me and our staff to really think outside the box and providing the support to our students, and our staff doing the direct work.

00:25:38 **Rigo**

Our student navigators, it's the first year that we've established the Student Navigator Program and our team, Monica, Gizelle, Greg, Kimberly, and Richard have been doing a fantastic job. Our case management team, our social workers Kyrie, Ulsa, Lorena, our special case worker and our team and our food resources staff.

00:25:58 **Rigo**

Our CalFresh expert, Vivian Hernandez - our Mountie Fresh Food Pantry expert, Helen. Helen Hernandez has been doing an extremely great job with her team, Samantha, Stephanie, with Gio.

00:26:11 **Rigo**

So, just wanted to do that for our team. They deserve it. Oh, and I forgot the most important piece. I'm sorry, Barbara Carillo, great behind the scenes. Really been able to keep us together through COVID and now. So, thank you all.

00:26:24 **Sun**

Thank you. That's such a lovely shout out and I just want to thank both of you for joining today to talk about all of the work that you and your team and the committee are doing to support basic needs and wellbeing for the Mt. SAC students. Thank you so much.

00:26:38 **Pauline**

Thank you for having us.

00:26:39 **Rigo**

Thank you so much.

00:26:45 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. And don't forget to share your favorite episodes.