

# Helping Hands Abound

**Emergency assistance fund tops \$100,000 in aid provided; campus food pantry set to open**

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**THE FOOD REPURPOSING PROJECT LAUNCHED AT UNH IN APRIL AND HAS BEEN PROVIDING READY-TO-EAT MEALS FROM UNUSED DINING HALL FOOD AND DONATED ITEMS FOR DISTRIBUTION AT LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES.**

It's not unusual for college students to worry about paying for tuition, room, board and books, especially here in New Hampshire, where average student loan debt is among the highest in the country. But a recent survey shows that a surprising number of UNH

students also struggle to afford day-to-day essentials – food, shelter and transportation to and from campus or a job.

Of nearly 2,000 UNH students surveyed last spring, 20 percent said they have skipped at least one meal because they couldn't afford it, while 15 percent said they would use a food pantry if there was one on campus, and 11 percent reported that they were homeless, or close to homeless, in their past.

“There is a lot more need out there than people might imagine when they walk around and see this beautiful campus and all the students on their way to classes,” said Joan Glutting, clinical associate professor of psychology and member of UNH's [Student Basic Needs](#) Committee. “But when you really get to know them, you realize that a lot of students are facing some real financial challenges.”

COVID-19 brought the issue to a head last fall, when many students who had never needed or asked for help before suddenly found themselves running short of food, behind on rent and unable to travel home when campuses closed and transitioned to remote learning.

“This is personally important for Jan and me,” said President Jim Dean. He and his wife, Jan Dean, were early advocates for increasing support to students facing financial crises. “COVID-19 really showed us that the extent of that need is surprising.”

In response, the Faculty Senate passed a motion to create the Student Emergency Assistance Fund, and the Office of Student Life launched and now manages the program, which provides fast, temporary financial help to students in need. Typically, awards are about \$500 per student.

Nearly 500 alumni, faculty, staff, parents and friends contributed donations, including longtime donors Morgan Rutman '84 and his wife, Tara, who made a \$25,000 matching gift. Support also grew for [Inn Between](#), which provides emergency housing assistance, and the [UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law Student Emergency Financial Assistance Fund](#), which helps students at the law school in Concord.

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In the last academic year, the Office of Student Life dispersed funds providing more than \$100,000 in direct support and nearly 1,200 meals through [Swipe It Forward](#), which provides free meals at the dining halls. In total, the fund provided roughly \$29,000 in student support last fall, \$11,600 during January and \$60,000 in the spring.

This fall, the Basic Needs Committee is taking these efforts a step further with the creation of UNH's first-ever student food pantry on the Durham campus.

Paul Young, an AmeriCorps VISTA worker brought to UNH through a federal/state partnership, has been helping UNH address food insecurity among students and in local

communities since early last year. Partners include [Campus Compact for New Hampshire](#), [New Hampshire GEAR UP Alliance](#), [New Hampshire College and University Council](#) and [AmeriCorps VISTA](#). And in April, Young helped launch the [Food Repurposing Project](#), a partnership between UNH Dining Services and [Gather](#), a food pantry and distribution network that's been feeding families on the Seacoast for more than 200 years.

Food Repurposing Project volunteers from COLSA, Dining Services and Gather meet each week to prepare ready-to-eat meals from unused dining hall food and donated items and distribute it to local food pantries. During the program's pilot phase, launched in April 2021, the team produced 200-300 meals per week.

The new food pantry on the Durham campus is expected to open in the Memorial Union Building during the fall semester and will be supplied from the New Hampshire Food Bank and Gather.

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