

WCU Resource Pantry Opens Its Doors



A small suite on the top floor of the Lawrence Center is now stocked with nonperishable food, notebooks and other school supplies, toiletries, dress clothes, winter coats, even pantyhose and socks. This is the WCU Resource Pantry, a collaborative initiative between Financial Aid and Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs that aims to address the issues of food insecurity and limited resources faced by some WCU students.

There are at least 30 students on campus who don't have homes to return to during school breaks, instead relying on friends, distant relatives, WCU Residence Life or the WCU Foundation to provide housing. There are many other students who do have permanent homes but often find their budgets stretched thin due to a family emergency or because they're in-between paychecks.

These are the students that the WCU Resource Pantry is already serving this semester, during its "soft launch." The pantry is currently open to clients by appointment but will be open regularly scheduled hours during the spring semester, said Mariah Laraio, pantry coordinator and an AmeriCorps PACC*VISTA member.

Laraio is supported by a Resource Pantry Advisory Board and by pantry co-founder, Tori Weigant Nuccio, assistant director of financial aid. Jamie Williams, who was assistant director of service-learning and volunteer programs until a recent relocation, also was instrumental in launching the pantry.

The Resource Pantry had humble beginnings – under Nuccio's desk. "For a couple years, I had a box under my desk with shampoo, soap, protein bars and other healthy snacks, notebooks and pens – ready to go when the occasion arose," said Nuccio. "Often we will see a short-term need that can mean the difference between student success and failure," she added. "For example, a student might need a flash drive for a class project that's due tomorrow but they don't have the money to buy a drive until they get paid next Friday."

The box under Nuccio's desk expanded, and after more donations came in, including winter coats and interview suits, pantry inventory was moved to temporary quarters in Commonwealth Hall last year. The new, permanent home of the WCU Resource Pantry opened in late September.

The Resource Pantry will work with several departments across campus to host financial literacy, life skills, and professional development workshops for students utilizing the pantry. Along with student volunteers, federal work study students will staff the pantry. These students will be

actively included in the process of developing the functions and overall impact of the project, noted Laraio.

The Resource Pantry has received support from University Student Housing, the Chester County Food Bank, Education Navigation, Act in Faith of Greater West Chester, and the Pennsylvania State Chapter of PEO.

If you know a student who you believe would benefit from the Resource Pantry, contact resourcepantry@wcupa.edu. Intake appointments will help determine the student's needs and how the Resource Pantry can best assist. If your unit or department would like to donate to the Resource Pantry, contact Laraio at the above email address.

“We are very appreciative of all the support we have already received from the University community,” said Laraio. “By contacting us first, we can avoid a situation where we receive, for example, lots of notebooks but no flash drives or pens. Our storage space is fairly limited so what is most needed and appreciated are gift cards and donations of cash.”

Monetary donations to the WCU Resource Pantry are tax-deductible.