

## **The USCL Student Food Pantry**

### ***Our humble beginnings...Fall 2016***

The USCL Student Food Pantry began with just an idea. We set up in a tiny office in Hubbard Hall in the Fall 2016. I hired a student assistant, and we began collecting donations for the food pantry from faculty, staff and students who were willing to donate any non-perishable goods. We had no budget, so this is what we did to start.

Quickly realizing that donations would not suffice to fulfill the student need, we realized that we needed to begin to raise funds so that we could purchase needed food items and supplement what was being donated.

### ***Grants and donations***

Thanks to organizations such as Kohl's Corp.; the Springs Close Foundation; Founders Credit Union in Lancaster, SC; SCCL Volunteers and Helping Hands Club, Indian Land, SC, as well as generous individuals, we were able to raise several thousand dollars in donations for the USCL Student Food Pantry account in the Educational Foundation.

We have also received help in the form of food donations individuals, but also from KARE (Kershaw) and TRIO, who, with the support of their Director, Matt Williamson, organizes a food drive specifically for the USCL Student Food Pantry every semester. This support has really made a difference for the food pantry—especially during times when funds were low.

As our budget and donations grew, we were able to provide more help to students who were struggling. Based on donations, we were able to budget \$100 every two weeks for groceries initially. This very quickly became not enough for the demand of food needed, and thankfully now, donations have increased to where we can budget \$500 every two weeks.

### ***The USCL Food Pantry expands...***

As the food pantry demand increased, thanks to the support of our Dean, Dr. Collins, we were able to re-locate the food pantry from Hubbard Hall to the larger and more visible Founders Hall lobby area in Fall 2018. This area came with cabinets where we keep food such as canned goods and food for cooked meals such as pasta and sauces, and we reserve one cabinet for where we keep "back stock" to replenish items that are taken most often.

On the shelf and tables that were in this space, we put the snack items and quick lunch items. Someone donated a small freezer that we use for the microwaveable frozen lunches. And with the help of a donation from Founders Credit Union, we purchased a full-size refrigerator. This is where we put water bottles, yogurt, individual bottles of milk and apple sauce.

With these funds and donations, we re-stock the food pantry with non-perishable foods such as Chef-Boy-R-dee, Ramen noodles, Macaroni and Cheese, breakfast cereals, frozen meals and water bottles. We also purchase some fresh items such as fruit, milk and yogurt. Additionally, we provide hygiene items such as razors, soap, shampoo, and tampons, as well as school supplies such as notebooks, pens and pencils.

### ***Who uses the food pantry?***

Students who use the food pantry range from those who just need a snack (such as one student who is hypoglycemic, did not have any snacks, and needed something to eat right away) to students who just forgot their lunch at home, to students who are in-between pay-checks and need food for a day or two to get by. Some of our students (some are single moms) are in more dire need and get food that can last for several days.

During a regular semester, based on student sign-in sheets, we estimate that as many as 50 students use the food pantry M-Th in a regular semester. During a typical semester, we keep the food pantry open from 9am-1pm, but students are made aware that if they need to access the food pantry outside of these hours, they can request access (either maintenance or another staff member will give students access. We just ask that they sign their name and each item that they take).

While we have far fewer students on campus coming to get a snack or lunch, we have noticed an increase of students with a more significant need for food visiting the food pantry since the pandemic.

### ***What else does the food pantry do for students?***

Each Christmas, the student food pantry hosts our Secret Angel. This is for students who are parents but are struggling with being able to buy gifts for their children at Christmas. Students are given access to a confidential form that is turned in to the food pantry with a wish list (much like the Salvation Army Angel tree) of items students' children would like for Christmas. We have been grateful to have a very generous community at USCL. Staff and faculty are asked to give donations or sponsor one or more items needed on the children's' wish list, and the support we receive is always above and beyond what is requested.

### ***Data Collection...***

Since the food pantry opened, we have adopted a "no questions asked" policy. The food pantry is a free resource to students, and they are welcome to take what they need. We do not require any proof of need, and we feel that in doing this, it limits the stigma associated with using a food pantry. Students are asked to sign their name and the items they took from the food pantry on the sign-in sheet provided. (We have a student assistant, work study or volunteer to sit at the desk outside the food

pantry during operating hours to make sure students use the sign-in sheet and to make sure the food pantry stays stocked.)

We have had a plan in place to begin to collect data on the students utilizing the food pantry. This was to begin in Spring 2020, but due to the pandemic, these plans were put on hold. We are preparing to resume our plans to collect hard data on student usage of the food pantry in the Fall 2021 with the help of a student assistant who will also aid me as a research assistant.

### ***Student Feedback on the food pantry...***

A lot of the feedback we get from students comes in the form of thank you emails, thank you cards, phone calls and words of thanks expressed when students walk by the food pantry. As part of our efforts to collect data on student usage, we hope to document, with students' permission, students' thoughts/appreciation for the help they get from the food pantry, as well.

### ***Awards received...***

In addition to the numerous grants and donations we continue to receive for the food pantry, we have been grateful to receive the OSP Faculty Service Award in 2019 for service to students through the food pantry. I felt very honored to receive this award as the sponsor of the food pantry, but I certainly could not do what we do for the food pantry without the support of the student assistants, work study students and volunteers who have been willing to serve. Additionally, the support of the Campus Dean, Dr. Collins, TRIO, and the organizations and individuals who have generously given grants and donations to the food pantry is why we are able to continue this service to students.