

Food Insecurity & NMC: preliminary data from our first three mobile pantries

Since early September, NMC has hosted 3 mobile food pantries. We would like to share some preliminary data from our first 6 weeks of operation. Pantries are offered twice monthly on Mondays, from 3-5 p.m. in the Maple Lot of NMC's main campus. Those who show up are provided approximately 7-10 days worth of fresh foods and perishable goods, or what they need for their household. We serve both drive-thru and walk-thru participants.

Background: NMC was able to acquire a \$15,000 grant through the NMC Foundation and Oleson Foundation to restart mobile food pantries at NMC. A previous iteration of the program ran in 2023 but was discontinued when funding ended. The 24-25 program has been adjusted for better outreach and accessibility for students. Specific changes include additional marketing and outreach, a change in time to later in the afternoon around 'k-12' school pick-up times, and use of a consistent day of the week (Mondays).

Financial: Food is delivered via a semi from Feeding America, from their warehouse in Cadillac. Each delivery contains around 4500 lbs. of food to be given out for free. The 'at cost' for each distribution is \$875, with it providing up to \$15,000 worth of food. Over the course of the 24-25 academic year, we will distribute upwards of \$300,000 worth of fresh foods, perishables, and other items to our NMC student community.

Mobile Pantry Distribution Statistics:

| Date | Lbs. Distributed | Households | Individuals Served | % served NMC affiliated households |
|---------|------------------|------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Sept 9 | 4529 | 93 | 233 (inc. 103 children) | 70% (65/93) |
| Sept 23 | 4085 | 69 | 220 (inc. 84 children 29 sr., 4 veterans) | 70% (48/69) |
| Oct 7 | 2984 | 96 | 230 (inc. 101 children, 24 seniors, 4 veterans) | 74% (71/96) |

To date, we have distributed 11,598 lbs of food to our NMC Community. Anyone who comes through the car lines is served, with only a sign in 'in case of food recall' to be completed. There are no means tests or financial requirements to participate. We allow NMC residence hall students to walk-thru and take what they need in a reusable shopping bag or backpack.

We are also working to partner with the Traverse City High School food pantry and Step Up / Take 5 programs to get food to their nutrition programs and pantries. Their students often become our students, so it is advantageous to support that relationship. These programs do a

pick up during the last 20 minutes of distributions (after the rush) thus ensuring we have filled most of the demand of our population(s).

Any 'leftovers' have been distributed to the Blair Elementary and Traverse Heights Elementary Food Closets, Feed the Kids cooler, and other entities that accept a drop off on Monday evenings. (*we have only had around 200 lbs (max) of goods leftover at any given time - usually things like ripped bags of potatoes, milk, and bulk apples. No goods have been returned or 'tossed out'.

Volunteers: Our mobile pantries have been staffed by volunteers: NMC faculty and staff, members of the NMC Foundation board, local Scouts from Troop 34 (Scouting America/Boy Scouts) and SU763 Girl Scouts, NMC students, and community members. Volunteers have completed tasks such as unloading and staging pallets, pre-boxing goods for pick up, packing bulk foods into family sized bags, loading cars, sign in sheets, and traffic control. Those wishing to volunteer can contact Cathy Warner at cwarner@nmc.edu to sign up.

Preliminary Observations and Findings: Many of our students and their families struggle with food insecurity and financial strain due to the cost of living in our community. Nearly half of the participants coming through distributions have minors/children in their household. 70-74% of participants are connected to NMC in some way: current or former students, alumni, or employees. While household sizes vary, we have regularly had 5-6 families of 6 or more members, and at least one family of 10 at every distribution. Three student-participants have self-identified as living in their cars. While we don't have data of the overall need at NMC, the success of this program demonstrates that the need exists and will continue to need to be addressed.

How can you help?: We continue to work to build awareness of the program amongst the NMC community. Please announce upcoming distributions in your classes or share with those that could benefit from participating. The program is designed to be more than a food insecurity program, it is a means that we can help students offset their grocery bill with healthy foods and thus free up their budgets for other expenses. Encourage students and members of the NMC community to utilize the program and share its impact with others.

We have four more distributions in 2024: October 28th, November 4th and 25th, and December 2nd. Are are on Mondays, 3-5 p.m. in the Maple Lot of NMC's main campus.

In the Spring, NMC will host distributions on January 20th, February 3rd and 24th, March 3rd and 17th, and April 7th and 21st. These will also all be on Mondays, 3-5 p.m., Maple Lot.