How To Best Connect Students with Basic Needs Support Resources

00:00:00 **Koji**

I think we're really demonstrating how we get through this together. With our students at the center of what we do and all of us working together, I think we can play a role in our students. Ultimately, they are here to get their education and finish their educational goal.

00:00:13 **Rigo**

If you are going through a basic need challenge, you're definitely not alone. Our team is really working and trying to alleviate these needs and help out as best as we can so that you continue to be able to focus on that educational goal.

00:00:31 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:33 **Sun**

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

00:00:37 **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.

00:00:53 **Sun**

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

00:00:53 **Student**

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

00:01:00 **Teacher**

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

00:01:09 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full time-

00:01:11 **Student**

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

00:01:18 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:20 **Student**

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

00:01:24 **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.

00:01:34 **Sun**

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

00:01:39 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:45 **Christina**

Hi, this is Christina, welcome back. In today's episode, we have Koji \*Uesugi, Dean of Student Services, Rigo Estrada, Basic Needs Coordinator, and Pauline Swartz, Library faculty and Basic Needs Committee faculty Co-Chair joining us for a very important discussion about basic needs.

00:02:05 **Christina**

In 2016, in 2018, more than 40,000 students at 57 California community colleges responded to the Hope Center's #realcollege survey about student experiences of college life. We learned that 50% of respondents reported food insecurity in the past 30 days, 60% reported housing insecurity in the previous year, and 19% reported being homeless in the previous year.

00:02:35 **Christina**

Mt. SAC has a range of basic needs support available, including CalFresh, the Mountie Fresh Food Pantry, housing referrals, the laptop loaner program, and so much more. We do know that faculty play an important role in connecting students to basic needs support.

00:02:52 **Christina**

So thank you for joining us today to learn more about the resources available to support the health, wellness, safety, and academic success of your students, especially during this time. And please encourage your students to participate in the California community colleges #realcollege survey this fall. The better we understand students' experiences in college, the better we can work together to support students in their academic and life journeys.

00:03:24 **Sun**

So Koji, Rigo, and Pauline, thank you so much for joining the Magic Mountie Podcast today to talk about basic needs at Mt. San Antonio College. I was wondering, would you each introduce yourselves and tell a little bit about your work with basic needs?

00:03:40 **Koji**

Sure, I guess I'll start. Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today. My name is Koji Uesugi, Dean of Student Services. And one of the areas that I oversee is our basic needs efforts, and it really started through our now what we call the Basic Needs Committee, which we launched almost three years ago now.

00:04:00 **Koji**

But that's been my involvement. And since then, we've been able to develop a basic needs resources area to provide services and resources to students in need.

00:04:11 **Rigo**

Thank you, and like Koji mentioned, for inviting us. My name is Rigo Estrada. I'm the Coordinator of our Mountie Fresh Basic Needs Resources program. I've been part of the program from its beginning. The program officially was established in May of 2018, and I was lucky enough to be able to join the position and help with providing resources and support for our students in need of basic needs support.

00:04:42 **Pauline**

I'm Pauline Swartz, and I am the faculty Co-chair of the Basic Needs Committee.

00:04:47 **Sun**

Thank you all so much. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what are the basic needs right now at the Mt. SAC community, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic?

00:04:58 **Rigo**

Sure, that's a loaded question, right? In terms of the specific needs of many of our students. But even before our pandemic, the vision of our program was to address our students' short and long-term basic needs in regards to their food resources, housing and mental health referrals, connecting them to job opportunities, and providing case management support.

00:05:21 **Rigo**

Since the introduction of the program, in working with our students, we've realized that the program that our students' basic needs revolve around these issues; whether it's not having the ability to access appropriate food or food in periods, having housing insecurities that range from being unable to pay rent or meet rent demands to being in unhealthy environment, to sleeping in their cars or sleeping in outside buildings or in the street.

00:05:56 **Rigo**

And then along those come the different aspects that create these situations or make it worse such as the lack of income because of no job involvement, and the mental health affects these types of situations have - these are the main basic needs challenges that we've seen within our student population here at Mt. SAC.

00:06:19 **Koji**

And just to add to that, I think given our current situation with our multiple pandemics; one being, of course, COVID-19 and the other, the racial injustices that we as a society continue to experience. These pandemics have further exposed the inequities in our societies and those who were impacted by food insecurities, housing insecurity prior to the ... especially now with COVID earlier this year, they really just further demonstrated that the populations that were impacted by these basic needs insecurities are further impacted because of the pandemic.

00:07:00 **Koji**

And we certainly see that impacting our own students here at Mt. San Antonio College, and what's happening in society impacts our students here. So I think across the state, basic needs is basically front and center in terms of resources, needs that we really need to ensure that our students have in order to help navigate their way through their current situation as college students, and navigating their way through the pandemic.

00:07:27 **Sun**

If you could talk a little bit more about what basic needs support Mt. SAC is able to offer right now.

00:07:33 **Rigo**

Part of our goal within the program is to leverage a lot of the existing resources and partnerships that are within campus and off-campus, and also implement some of the strategies. And part of those strategy and response to food insecurity here on campus are two main ones.

00:07:51 **Rigo**

We provide a targeted CalFresh outreach, where we educate the campus community on CalFresh benefits, the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that some of our campus students may be eligible for. The idea behind that is providing long-term food security for our students. If they qualify and are eligible for these programs such as CalFresh, then that can be consistent support that they can receive for that food security.

00:08:22 **Rigo**

Besides the CalFresh outreach, we help provide students with food security by having our food pantry, our Mountie Fresh Food Pantry, which I would venture out to say it's probably our most known program within Mountie Fresh Basic Needs resources - is a program that has been on campus for two years now, where with our community partners such as Sowing Seeds For Life, we provide food groceries for our students. That is something that we have been able to do.

00:08:57 **Rigo**

Beyond that, in regards to housing insecurities with our students, we meet with our students, assess their current situation, and then promote and refer students to our coordinated entry system, which are the systems of care in place that are locally in place that provide the actual housing support.

00:09:19 **Rigo**

As you may be aware, Mt. SAC does not directly offer housing resources. Unfortunately, we don't have the system or the means to be able to provide assistance in dorms or apartment complexes. So, we refer our students to our partnerships that we've created specifically through our partnership with Hathaway-Sycamores, where they have been able to co-locate a housing navigator of their own to assess our students' needs, provide problem-solving interventions, and assess the student into the appropriate housing resource that is offered through the County.

00:10:00 **Rigo**

On top of that, we are trying to implement our case managing aspect of the program, where we work with the students, checking with the students. And he shared that not only are these basic needs being met or working towards these basic needs - if that includes assistance with employment searches, assistance with getting them into special programs on campus that can alleviate some of their needs, kind of combining that and ensuring that things such as the financial aid, their counseling appointments and their educational goals are continuing to stay on track while they deal with these basic needs.

00:10:40 **Koji**

One thing I would like to add, the mental health component too, mental health has been a part of basic needs. I think we, as ... whether we're college students or not, mental health can impact us at different levels. And again, with the pandemic, this has really put a strain on many people's lives financially, for our students, just trying to navigate education, those raising responsible for families, which many of our students have, whether they're elders in the family or their own children.

00:11:12 **Koji**

So just really navigating all of that and just dealing with the impact of the pandemic has really created a lot of strain for our students.

00:11:21 **Koji**

And so Mountie health has been, and is now more so, an important part of basic needs. And through our program, we do collaborate with our behavioral wellness team on campus where referrals may be made regarding students who may be experiencing mental health issues. And along with that, closely associate may be basic needs as well. So there, we have a strong line of communication with our student health center and also some of our local partners that may offer telehealth. We can make referrals as well.

00:11:55 **Koji**

So Rigo, through his efforts, with the case management model, the food and the housing resources, they're certainly kind of front line types of services that students need. And we do the best we can to connect them to those resources. But we also want to make sure that they're doing well psychologically, mentally. And so, by really just checking in with them and seeing how they're doing and making again, resources and referrals as necessary is also an important part of our basic needs resources.

00:12:27 **Sun**

Thank you so much. Do you have any recommendations on good ways for folks to refer students to basic needs support services?

00:12:35 **Rigo**

Good question. There's different ways. I think Koji and Pauline can definitely chime in on this specific conversation. But previously, before working with basic needs, I was the program specialist with our REACH foster youth program on campus.

00:12:50 **Rigo**

And the great thing about Mt. SAC, and the different special programming and the different ways and opportunities that we have to engage with our students and create very unique rapport and relationships with our students, I think you have options depending on your role on campus and your engagement with that particular student.

00:13:11 **Rigo**

It can be as easy as encouraging a student to check out our website and have them set up appointments to meet with us, or seek out these resources themselves. Or if you feel like your student may struggle with that or have some hesitation, you're more than welcomed, depending on the specific basic needs issue to contact me directly on their behalf, provide some of the information.

00:13:39 **Rigo**

The goal will always be for us to allow the student to feel as safe as possible when requesting these resources, so that it has to happen where the communication is done through a middle person, until we're able to build that rapport and have the student engage with us directly.

00:13:56 **Rigo**

If it's a situation where the student may need multiple basic needs support, or have also some educational challenges that are going on, we also strongly encourage faculty and staff to initiate a behavioral wellness referral. As Koji mentioned, we do work extremely close with our behavioral wellness team. I, myself am part of that team. And when there's any cases related to basic needs, we work extremely close with their case manager, Haneen, who does a really good job on triaging a case and providing support.

00:14:32 **Rigo**

So that's kind of some other ways that I can see the staff member or our faculty encouraging or supporting students and reaching out to us for support.

00:14:43 **Koji**

I think for this one too, Pauline, she's not only our faculty Co-Chair for our Basic Needs Committee but just an amazing advocate for the program. And as a faculty member, it's so critical that we have faculty involvement. So she's certainly done a lot to refer students and to help with that and promoting the program. So, I think Pauline can share the faculty aspect and referrals.

00:15:07 **Pauline**

One thing I wanted to share is that the faculty have so many opportunities to build relationships with students in their classrooms. So they might feel comfortable talking to their faculty. So for faculty to just be aware of what resources are available, as well as how to connect their students with the resources, to know that Rigo is there and the basic resources website is there with so much information is helpful.

00:15:31 **Pauline**

And if you're not sure where to get started, we also have a syllabus statement ready for you to just insert into your syllabus if you use - well, everyone's using Canvas now. And the syllabus tool in Canvas, if you launch Cidi Labs, there's institutional policies section there, which includes ready-made syllabus statements about all kinds of things, including tutoring, as well as basic needs.

00:15:58 **Pauline**

So if you do include that in your syllabus, all of the links to the basic resources, team website's there, information about CalFresh is there, and you could just stick it in your syllabus. And either the student can approach you and talk to you about their needs, or at least, they'll be able to find information about basic needs resources in the syllabus. So that could be really helpful for students who may not want to talk to you, but need the information. At least, it's there in the syllabus as well.

00:16:30 **Rigo**

Again, many of our students are able to be eligible for certain - our special programs. And that's one thing that I also encourage the faculty to do, is a lot of times these special programs are already aware or have program specialists that can more easily transition a student to our basic needs. So if you're working with a student and you know that they're part of EOPS, or they're part of REACH, encouraging that student, "Hey, talk to that program that you're in, let them know what your current situation is." So that then that program can then create the bridge with us as well.

00:17:12 **Sun**

Great. Thank you, that's really helpful.

00:17:13 **Pauline**

One thing for people to consider is the real cost of college. And it's not just about tuition, but it's about commuting and the cost of gas as well as the textbooks. That can be really expensive (the textbook). So a few things that faculty can consider are incorporating zero-cost textbooks into their classes, if that's possible. And if that's not possible, or you prefer to use a traditional textbook to consider providing the library with the course textbook.

00:17:44 **Pauline**

Now, during COVID, while we're close for COVID, we can scan chapters of textbooks and email them to students. And that's helping a lot of students. I think we had over 800 requests filled in the first like one or two weeks of the semester. So a lot of students are getting help that way. So, consider the cost of your textbook and adopting a free textbook. And if that's not possible, consider providing the library with a copy of the textbook to make available to the students.

00:18:14 **Sun**

Thank you so much. I want to go back to something that you were sharing, Rigo. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about if a student does share that they're in crisis and they need some support right now, it can't wait for a week or two weeks - do you have a recommendation what could that faculty member do or that Mt. SAC employee do to get that student support as soon as possible?

00:18:38 **Rigo**

Yeah, it's a great question. On our website, we have two different ways a student can reach out to us. We do have in place a candidly app appointment system, where a student can seek to set up an appointment with us for a one-on-one consultation regarding their needs. Obviously, that will take some time in terms of the availability that works for whatever, the student, and my availability as well.

00:19:07 **Rigo**

But I strongly recommend any faculty or staff that has that situation to email me directly. I'm always going to encourage the staff or anybody on campus to really explore our website. We're doing our best to keep it updated, but we do feel that it has resources available both within campus system and also outside in the community.

00:19:30 **Rigo**

In regards to resources, it has some limited housing referrals, but some of those things that come with some of the basic needs. Our hopes are that a student can find some kind of support within that and be able to reach out to these local organizations. For a quick email, I try my best to stay up with my emails and be able to answer within a 24-hour period.

00:19:57 **Sun**

Great, thank you so much. And Pauline, I appreciate too, to go back to what you were saying, that in addition to being aware of these support services and being able to make announcements to our classes, also, we can do some kind of long-term thinking as faculty members about how to make our course materials more accessible to everyone.

00:20:18 **Koji**

Well, I just wanted to add, so in addition to the work that - I think basic needs touches different areas of the campus and different areas are responding. In addition to, especially, since the campus closure food was definitely .... and continues to be an important basic need. But also technology, because we are operating in an online environment now, a remote access.

00:20:42 **Koji**

So our campus has done an incredible job, certainly between student services, library, and IT staff, and others. Truly been a collaborative effort to provide technology to our students. So the laptop loan program with hotspots, that continues into the fall. So they'll continue to distribute technology to students in need.

00:21:03 **Koji**

Now, I think this is just an indicator of what kind of campus community Mt. SAC is. We have tremendous support from our faculty staff and administrators regarding basic needs. And when there are opportunities to volunteer, whether it's for the food pantry or donate items, people just step up. They come out and they ask, "Hey, what can I do? What can I provide?"

00:21:27 **Koji**

So this current situation has certainly kind of elevated the need. And with that, the spirit in which our campus community continues to show support has not diminished at all. In fact, it's strengthened. And so, we're looking to see how we can better collaborate with various departments, both on campus and off.

00:21:52 **Koji**

I think we're really demonstrating how we get through this together. With our students at the center of what we do and all of us working together, I think we can play a role in our students ... ultimately, they're here to get their education and finish their educational goal, and we want to do what we can to provide the support that they can benefit from so they can complete their education and move on.

00:22:14 **Koji**

One more, I guess a plug, we're really excited that we'll be a part of the #realcollege survey. This is a basic needs survey that sponsored through the Hope Center. We took part in this survey in the fall of 2018, and we are also participating this year. So the announcement will be coming out shortly within a week or so. And this survey will be made available to all enrolled students. And basically, the Hope Center wants to hear from them about their experiences.

00:22:44 **Koji**

Once the responses are submitted and analyzed, I will be receiving a report. And hopefully, we'll be able to use this report to help guide our basic needs efforts. So we think we're doing a lot of good things on campus, but we certainly know that there are a lot of things that we can do better and things that we haven't even thought about. And so, we hope that through our students' voices, they can guide us in better supporting the needs of our students.

00:23:11 **Sun**

So students should keep an eye out for that email. And is there anything that faculty or classified or managers can do to support that effort?

00:23:20 **Koji**

Certainly, we'll be providing flyers, we'll be informing certainly our managers on campus. Our faculty are key as Pauline said. So, faculty will be receiving information as well, so they can promote it through their medium, through Canvas and other technology that they may be using to communicate with students. This will be a campus-wide effort to promote the surveys so we can get as many students to participate.

00:23:46 **Rigo**

On my end, there's a few things that I definitely wanted to highlight. The first thing I think is encouraging any student that gets the opportunity to listen to this podcast, or just sharing it with the students and just folks that you're aware are having some of these difficulties, is really consider looking into the CalFresh benefits.

00:24:06 **Rigo**

Nowadays with the food insecurity that exists, applying for CalFresh benefits is something that is a lot easy. Nowadays, where everything's done remotely through the phone or your laptop - on our website, we have personalized links that any students can access to apply for CalFresh. The nice thing about this is that the user-friendly application process walks you through these questions and allows you to really have an idea of whether or not you're eligible.

00:24:40 **Rigo**

Not every student is eligible to receive these resources or this benefit, but it does not hurt to give it a try. If you do qualify as an independent CalFresh recipient, you will be eligible to receive up to $194 worth of benefits which means that you'll be able to spend via an EBT card, which is very much like a credit card. At any grocery store that accepts EBT, you'd be able to do your grocery with this card.

00:25:14 **Rigo**

It is money that will be continuously put into your account every month. So again, I feel that it does not hurt to give CalFresh a try. If you do not qualify and you are in need of food resources, please contact us so that we can figure out what is the best way to provide that additional support.

00:25:35 **Rigo**

And the general statement regarding our basic needs efforts, Koji mentioned about the Real College Survey - we want to let students know that if you are going through a basic need challenge, you're definitely not alone. Our last Real College Survey that was conducted in 2018, revealed that at Mt. SAC, about 18% of our respondents reported being homeless at some point during the previous year. 58 responded that they were housing insecure, and 46% responded that they were food insecure within the last 30 days.

00:26:12 **Rigo**

Granted, these numbers are outdated by a couple of years, but we see that it, unfortunately, has not gotten any better, especially because of the pandemic. So know that you are not alone, know that our campus, our team is really working and trying to alleviate these needs and help out as best as we can so that you continue to be able to focus on that educational goal. So please, if you have any of these needs, reach out to us and we can work together to figure out the best plan of action.

00:26:48 **Sun**

Well, Koji, Rigo, and Pauline, I just really want to thank you so much for taking the time to share today with Magic Mountie Podcast listeners about basic needs support available for Mt. SAC students, and to thank you for your incredible work, doing this absolutely critical work to support the wellbeing of our students on their educational and life journeys. Thank you so much for joining today.

00:27:12 **Koji**

Thank you, Sun. I really appreciate the opportunity to do this.

00:27:14 **Rigo**

Definitely, thank you so much for providing the space to be able to share about our resources, encourage the students. Also, follow us on social media, I'm sorry. We are actively trying to promote our resources on social media, on Instagram at Mt. SAC Basic Needs, thank you.

00:27:36 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts, so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however, you like to listen.

00:27:50 **Christina**

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