

BC3 targets food insecurity as Pioneer Pantry debuts

Sept. 5, 2019



Sally Minick, left, and Noelle Steedle, both of Butler and Butler County Community College business management students, fill bags with food Thursday, Aug. 29, 2019, inside BC3's new Pioneer Pantry.

(Butler, PA) Her stomach growled, evoking fears her emptiness would divulge to classmates she hadn't eaten in some two days.

Academics weren't on her mind. Only her hunger.

That, Kelsey said, and "whenever I would have enough money to go buy something to eat."

The new Pioneer Pantry at Butler County Community College – in a county where an estimated 10.4 percent of its residents are food insecure, where up to 5,000 people monthly utilize one of 25 Alliance for Nonprofit Resources-registered food banks – will serve students like Kelsey, whether enrolled full or part time, or in credit or noncredit programs.

The Pioneer Pantry, in Room 100 of the Arts and Hospitality building on BC3's main campus, will provide Alliance for Nonprofit Resources-distributed food monthly to only income-eligible BC3 students who, like Kelsey, live in Butler County.



Savannah Neyman, of Butler, and a Butler County Community College business management and hospitality management student, places a sign on an Arts and Hospitality building window overlooking main campus Thursday, Aug. 29, 2019, to promote BC3's new Pioneer Pantry.

Separately, the pantry will also provide food collected through drives, drop boxes or purchased with financial gifts to all BC3 students, faculty or staff members, regardless of income or county of residence.

“It is going to be extremely helpful for students because I know some of them go to class and they haven’t eaten,” Kelsey said.

Food insecurity, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is having reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet. A U.S. Government Accountability Office report to congressional leaders in December reflected the review of 31 independent studies, 22 of which suggested food insecurity could affect more than 30 percent of collegians.

“It will make a huge difference”

Between 19 percent and 44 percent of 6,222 students from 14 western Pennsylvania colleges or universities and their branch campuses reported moderate to high food insecurity in responding to a 2018 Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Campus Cupboard survey. Of the 304 BC3 students who answered a 2018 Wisconsin HOPE Lab survey, 38 percent indicated having low or very low food security.

“If it is long-term food insecurity, there is a chance that someone is not going to be able to perform well, or function well,” said Kevin Boozel, a 1991 BC3 graduate and commissioner in

Butler County, where an estimated 10.4 percent of its 186,000 residents were food insecure in April 2016, according to a Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank report.

Food insecurity “is significant to them and their families,” said Sandra Curry, community partnership manager of the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources, a Butler management company that provides services to organizations, nonprofits, businesses and governmental entities – and food to those 5,000 income-eligible residents using 25 Butler County pantries.

“If your family is food insecure,” Curry said, “that is significant to you.”

BC3’s Pioneer Pantry, registered through the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources, will be open semimonthly.

Distribution times and dates are from 10 a.m. to noon Sept. 16, Oct. 14, Nov. 11 and Dec. 9; and from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sept. 12, Oct. 10, Nov. 7 and Dec. 5, said Karen Jack, director of BC3’s Keystone Education Yields Success project and one of seven administrators or faculty members on the first Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team.

“I believe it will make a huge difference in the lives of our students and their families,” Jack said. “It will ease the burden of having to travel all over the place to obtain supplemental food and, with the help of food stations, will ensure that students are not hungry while they are on campus.”

“This will absolutely benefit the students”

Food insecurity caused 14 percent of respondents to the Campus Cupboard survey to drop a class, 26 percent to miss a class, 33 percent to miss a study session, and 59 percent to state their academic performance suffered.

Food received from the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources is available to only BC3 students from Butler County whose self-declared incomes meet guidelines established by the state Department of Agriculture’s Emergency Food Assistance Program, Jack said.



Olivia Tennent, of Butler, a Butler County Community College hospitality management student, places a sign outside of BC3’s Arts and Hospitality building on Thursday, Aug. 29, 2019, to promote BC3’s new Pioneer Pantry.

Pioneer Pantry drop boxes have been placed in BC3's Student Success Center, in the Administration, Business and Health Professions, and Science and Technology buildings, and in Room 103 of BC3's Arts and Hospitality building, said Jennifer Loue, BC3's coordinator of access and disability resources and a member of the Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team.

Four financial gifts totaling \$1,344 to the BC3 Education Foundation since May 31, including three from BC3 trustees, were designated by donors to benefit the Pioneer Pantry, said Ruth Purcell, executive director of the foundation.

BC3's social work club gave \$284 raised through a basket raffle to the Pioneer Pantry, said Dr. Karen Stubenbort, a BC3 assistant professor of humanities and social sciences.

An Aug. 29 email to all BC3 employees from the Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team also requested all types of nonperishable and nonexpired food to be donated to the pantry.

"This will absolutely benefit the students," said Morgan Rizzardi, BC3's associate director of admissions and a Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team member. "If you think about the hierarchy of needs, students who do not have basic needs met cannot persist successfully in higher education."

The debut of the Pioneer Pantry also reflects objectives in BC3's 2017-2022 strategic plan that aim to increase student retention and completion rates.

"As BC3's retention specialist, faculty and staff will refer students to me because the students have expressed that they're struggling with hunger," said Ivory Dunlap, who is also an academic counselor and assistant professor, and Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team member. "This struggle often presents itself as a decline in the students' academics."

Pioneer Pantry near parking lot

Students seeking confidentiality can use parking lot 6, which is near Room 100 of the Arts and Hospitality building, said Jennifer Taylor, a BC3 business instructor, coordinator of the college's hospitality management program and Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team member.

Alliance for Nonprofit Resources foods available in the Pioneer Pantry in September may include 7-ounce boxes of cereal; 7.25-ounce boxes of macaroni and cheese; 17-ounce boxes of organic butternut squash soup; 14.5-ounce cans of peach halves in juice, and of spaghetti and meatballs; 10.5-ounce cans of vegetarian vegetable soup; 2-pound bags of enriched long grain rice; and 2-pound bags of frozen pollock.

In addition to Alliance for Nonprofit Resources food, and food collected through drives, drop boxes or purchases, BC3 also offers a grab-and-go station near the Keystone Education Yields Success office in the Student Success Center and available to all students, Jack said.

Grab-and-go items can include 1.79-ounce bags of instant oatmeal, 1.49-ounce granola bars, 3-ounce cans of apple sauce; 1.38-ounce packages of cheddar cheese sandwich crackers – and 3-ounce packages of Ramen noodles, which is all Kelsey once ate for a week.

“It didn’t really help with the hunger at all because I would eat it at night and by the morning it would be worn off,” she said. “I kept getting distracted in class. My mind was more scattered.”

Kelsey plans to graduate with an associate of arts degree.

The Pioneer Pantry Food Security Team is focused initially on the pantry on BC3’s main campus, Jack said, adding that the project may be considered in the future at BC3’s additional locations.

For more information or to register, visit bc3.edu/pioneer-pantry. Questions can also be emailed to foodpantry@bc3.edu.