What is the impact on providing food to those in need?

In November 2019, Ben Falter accepted the NaBITA Best Practices/Institutional Impact Award for San José State’s work in creating their 1,000sq ft campus food pantry. The campus provided different levels of food support for years, from temporary meal plans, to small food shelves with non-perishable goods, to a quarter-acre urban garden in the downtown of the 10th biggest city in the U.S. Last March, the campus stepped up the efforts by opening a fully staffed walk-in food pantry offering not only non-perishables, but cold/frozen foods, dairy products, and fresh produce.

The need was there. After opening its doors, the campus saw students flood in. In the Fall 2019 semester alone they tracked 11,626 visits to the pantry by 2,897 unique students and gave away 80,545 lbs. of free food.

Now that the pantry is in its third semester of operation, they are beginning to see trends, improve collaboration with partners inside and outside of the university, and measure how providing basic needs supports are helping student success. When a student is well fed and not endlessly worried about how to fund all of their food needs, it allows them to focus on academics, reduce stress, and avoid mental/physical health issues. Their SJSU Cares Program is run by campus case managers alongside of the Behavioral Intervention Team; working together they can help provide resources before someone is in distress, and also use basic need supports, like the pantry, as part of interventions when meeting with students.

In addition to creating a low-barrier system, Ben has also created a network with a national listserv and Facebook group for campuses who have larger scale, staffed pantries, so they have a system to benchmark, ask questions, and improve operations. Follow us @SJSUFoodPantry on Instagram, Twitter, & Facebook for ideas for your campus. If you don’t currently have basic needs supports, consider adding that to your next BIT agenda to see what makes sense for your campus.

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