

CSU Basic Needs Training & Resource Center Report: Elevating & Supporting System-wide Basic Needs Efforts



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Background & Purpose

Despite the expansion of Basic Needs programming across California State University campuses, most do not have an existing infrastructure (such as pantry food safety training standards, basic needs programming, CalFresh Outreach, or pantry internship program etc.). On-site and statewide trainings have been critical for supporting current basic needs services and resources. However, these traditional training models are not cost effective or sustainable long term with the high turnover rate of campus staff. Without having accessible resources and training in place the knowledge and ability to continue the momentum of these services are potentially lost.

The California State University *Basic Needs Training & Resource Center (BNTRC)* is an SB 85 funded Innovation project, implemented by CSU Chico's Center for Healthy Communities (CHC). The ultimate goal of the *BNTRC* is to elevate and align basic needs programming efforts across the California State University system. The primary outcomes for this SB-85-funded Innovation award *BNTRC* project include: 1) identifying the basic needs topics that campuses have requested or need, 2) creating web-based intervention training modules for CSU campus staff and interns to address these gaps and needs, 3) pairing these *BNTRC* modules with available technical assistance support from CHC to ensure proper use and to answer questions, 4) assess the impact and use of these *BNTRC* resources using a pre-to post study design, 5) disseminating the *BNTRC* to the CSU campuses for long-term access state-wide.



Methods

This study included a pre-intervention survey to assess current levels of basic needs program implementation and requests for new programs, the creation and dissemination of six training modules and a post-intervention survey to assess the impact of the intervention. The pre-intervention survey was administered to all 23 CSU campuses. This 51-item survey was administered using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics Core XM Academic 2020, Provo, UT) and included sections such as campus information, basic needs services, implementation level of services, and campus partnerships. In addition to the questions that provided quantitative data, the survey also included an open-ended question and comment box for collecting qualitative information. The survey was tested for content validity, readability, and revised as necessary. CSU participation recruitment included: a request from the CSU Office of the Chancellor to the basic needs point person on each campus, email requests from CHC to the CSU campuses, and reminders to participate via email and phone. All CSU campuses completed the pre-survey by the end of spring semester/quarter of 2019. The intervention began at the end of Spring 2019 and is currently still available on the *BNTRC* website alongside CHC technical assistance. The post-survey was administered between end of Spring 2019 and the end of end of January 2020.



Pre-survey

The extent of implementation of selected basic needs programs were assessed by using a 6-point scale from 0 being “I don’t know what this is” to 6 being “We have this, but there are no improvements that need to be made.” For analysis purposes these numbers were converted into a percent, where 0 represented 0 percent implementation and 6 represented 100 percent implementation. These percentages were then used to calculate basic needs programs averages across all CSU campuses. Table 1 shows food pantries and CalFresh Outreach programs were the closest to full-implementation at 80% and 79% respectively. The programs with the lowest implementation rates included appliance and kitchen tool donations (40%), Restaurant Meal Program* (41%), CalFresh EBT on campus (53%), and pantry food safety programs (54%).

Qualitative data included twelve comments in total. Seven comments focused on appreciation or explanation of work being done on a campus. Five comments were direct requests for additional support for 1) self-care and mental health support among the basic needs team, 2) incorporating professional Case Managers/Social Workers on campus, 3) permanent basic needs team funding (2 comments), and 4) increased space on campus to grow campus pantry.

Table 1. Baseline Assessment for Basic Need Programing on CSU Campuses in 2019

Basic Needs Programs	Average Campus Implementation Percentage*
Food Pantry	80%
CalFresh Outreach Program	79%
Farmers' Market on or Near Campus	70%
CalFresh EBT on Campus	53%
Restaurant Meal Program (RMP) Participation*	41%
Student Internship Program	70%
Food Safety Program with Campus Pantry(s)	54%
Partnership with County Social Services	71%
Emergency Housing Assistance	74%
Pop-Up Pantry(s)	64%
Nutrition Education	74%
Appliance and Kitchen Tool Donation	40%
Clothing Exchange	62%
Cooking Classes/Demos	67%
Meal Swipe Donation Program	72%

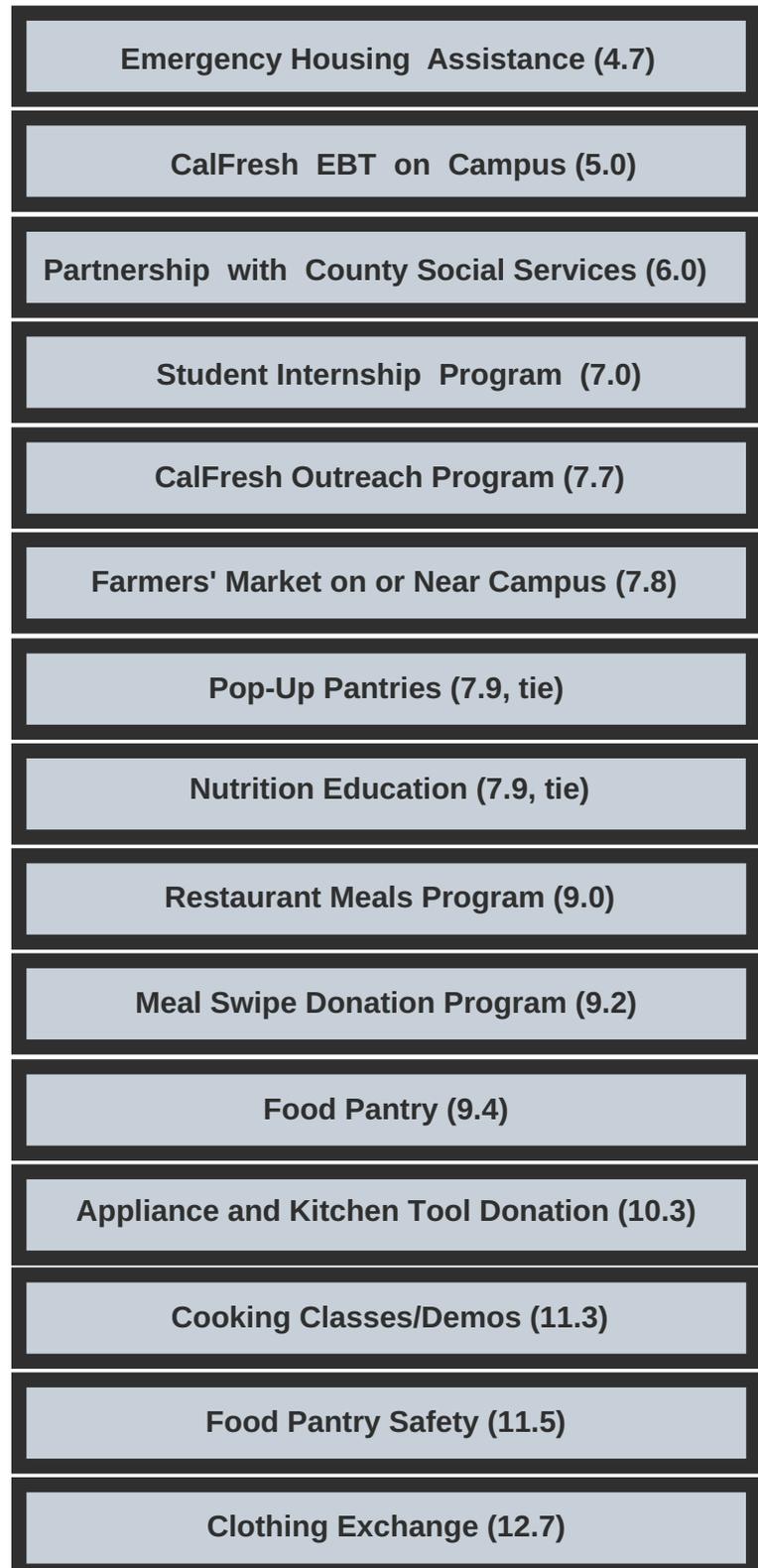
*At the time of the pre survey, the USDA’s Restaurant Meal Program (RMP) was still restricted to approved RMP counties only.

*Average Campus Implementation Percentage is indicated by converting their 0 to 6 response rate into a percentage where 0 is 0 percent implementation and 6 is 100 percent implementation.

Intervention: Training Modules

Data from the campus implementation percentage found in table 1 and needed program rankings from figure 1 along with CHC's experience working with college campuses were used to determine which of the six funded training modules would be created for the intervention. Two of the top rankings (i.e. Emergency Housing Assistance and Partnership with County Social Services) were not created due to various campus limitations. For example, at the time of receiving this funding in 2018, many campuses did not have the means or resources to develop emergency housing programs and best practices had not yet been identified. Similarly, many CSU campuses at the time of this funding did not have existing relationships with county offices of social services or had many students from surrounding counties that had not yet been identified.

There were two training modules that were not in the top six rankings, but were created due to the critical nature of those topics according to CHC. Specifically, food pantry safety was created because of the risks a campus could incur if food safety was not a priority. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for this module more than ever. Proper food safety practices such as having pantry food safety guidelines, making sure staff know what proper hand washing is and when to wash hands, and making sure staff and interns know when to stay home when sick is critical to limiting the spread of COVID-19, food borne illness, and other illnesses like the common flu. In addition, the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) training module was created because legislation surrounding RMP had just been passed for the CSU system which would allow students who have a disability, are above the age of 59, or who are experiencing homelessness to purchase hot meals with their CalFresh Food benefits at approved campus restaurants.



Rankings from lowest (13) to most (1) requested training modules

Figure 1: Visualization of the top ranked basic needs resources as indicated by 23 CSU campuses pre intervention

Training Modules

As a result of these timely and critical factors, the final six training module topics include nutrition education, internship program, pantry food safety, Restaurant Meals Program, Farmers' Market, and CalFresh Food EBT card payment options on campus. Each training module includes: 1) "How to start" resources which includes an introduction video, a resource guide, and other training materials 2) resources for implementation including internal check lists and customizable documents or presentations. Five out of the six training modules also includes 3) resources to print and support implementation which included ready to print posters, flyers, and communication templates. All resources were added to a CHC hosted [CSU Basic Needs Training & Resource Center website](#) publicly available to all CSU campuses and their partners. Each resource or tool available within each training module has information about how a CSU campus can reach out to CHC for technical assistance. Data was also collected via a post-intervention survey to determine if resources helped inform, improve, and elevate campus basic needs efforts across the CSU system.



Nutrition Education



Restaurant Meals Program



Internship Program



Farmers' Market



Pantry Food Safety



EBT on Campus

Training Module Dissemination

Training materials were disseminated to basic needs coordinators, dining services directors, and CalFresh Outreach coordinators from all 23 CSU campuses via two interactive webinars, Elevating Campus Basic Needs Impact Webinar and the Food Security Resources Webinar.

Results

Post-survey Results

The post-survey results were based on 6-point scale from 0 being “I don’t know what this is” to 6 being “We have this, but there are no improvements that need to be made.” For analysis purposes these post-survey numbers were compared to pre-survey numbers and the difference was converted into a percent, where 0 represented 0 percent implementation increase and 6 represents 100 percent implementation increase.

Only 13 of the 23 CSU campuses participated in the post-intervention survey. This low response rate was due to the timing of the post-survey period. Responses were collected from mid-December 2019 to end of January 2020 which is when many staff in higher education take time off. The most impactful findings on program implementation for the 13 campuses post-intervention included a 30 percentage point increase in implementation of food pantry safety, 17 percentage point increase in implementation of EBT process for stores on campus, and 5 percentage point increase in nutrition education programming. All 13 CSU campus respondents who completed the post-survey reported visiting the [BNTRC website](#) and utilizing the available *BNTRC* resources.

Additional basic needs activities outside of the six *BNTRC* modules were reported in the January 2020 post-intervention survey. Specifically, the 13 CSU campuses reported a 13 percentage point decrease in their local county social service department partnerships. In addition, there was a 16 percentage point increase in clothing swap implementation, 8 percentage point increase in CalFresh Outreach implementation, and a 5 percentage point increase in meal swipe donation programs.

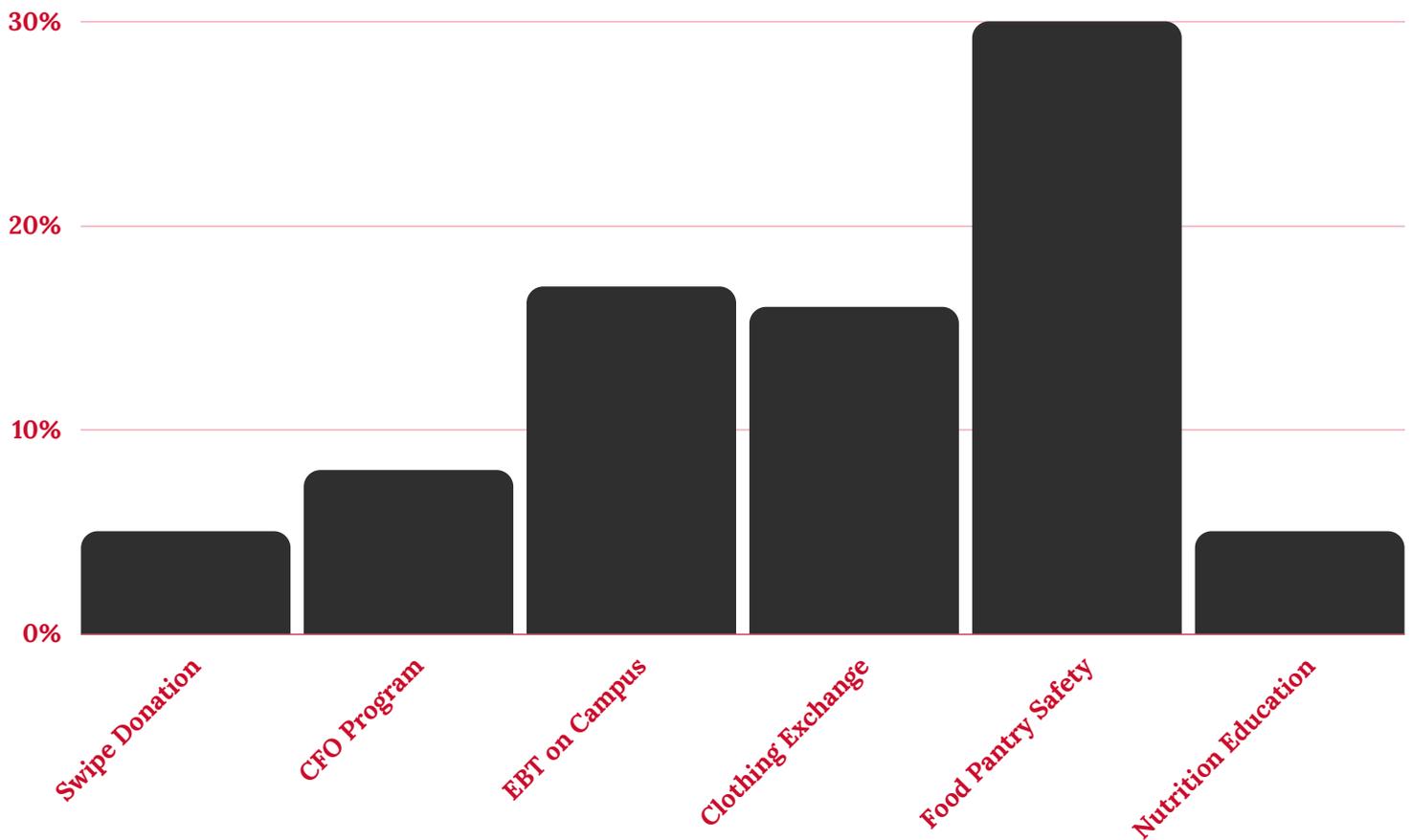


Figure 2: Pre-to-post-intervention percentage point increase in program implementation

Discussion

As mentioned above, although food pantry safety was not a top ranked module pre-intervention, CHC developed this module knowing the critical need and timely legislation surrounding food safety on campus. The intervention on food pantry safety implementation proved effective and will help ensure pantries are safe for students and remain open. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this module will continue to be promoted and up-dated as needed.

EBT on campus support has been requested by campuses for many years on CSU Office of Chancellor webinars and during CSU meetings and conferences. Therefore, it was no surprise that this program was ranked second among all basic needs programs. This EBT program is quite complex for campus retail stores to implement and required communication among the USDA, California Department of Social Services and campus staff before the module could be tested and created. As a result, this module, in particular, is quite cost effective for campuses to use due to the fact that many questions and problems have been answered and resolved. CHC provided technical assistance to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Sonoma State, CSU Channel Islands, CSU East Bay, Sacramento State, and Cal Poly Pomona alongside this module. Therefore, the effectiveness of these *BNTRC* training modules seems to improve when they are also supported with technical assistance via phone, email or other one-on-one communication.

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) was of interest to many CSU campuses especially after Assembly Bill 1894 was approved in 2018. This training module was a challenge because the memorandum of understanding had not yet been created between California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the CSU Office of the Chancellor. Therefore, this module's resources were only useful for campuses in RMP approved counties which include Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz. Once the CSU Office of the Chancellor completes a memorandum of understanding with CDSS or other legislation is passed to allow RMP in all California counties, this training module could be easily updated to reflect such changes.

Emergency housing was a top requested need from CSU campuses at the time of the pre-survey, however, CHC determined readily available resources and best practices were not yet apparent and needed further exploration before development of this training module. CHC will continue to pursue funding to develop and maintain this critical *BNTRC* module in the future.



CalFresh Outreach services was ranked fifth out of all basic needs services requested in the pre-survey. Despite the high ranking, this was not selected as one of the six modules due to the many existing resources on the CHC at CSU, Chico's CalFresh Outreach website and additional work supported by CDSS for a higher education CalFresh Outreach handbook. This CalFresh Outreach on College Campuses Handbook is being developed and will be available by fall 2020 via CDSS and CHC websites. Additional funding will support the maintenance of this handbook over time as application assistance, eligibility and legislation requirements continue to change.



Partnerships between campuses and local county social service departments are vital. Although campus staff help students apply for social service programs like CalFresh Food, disability, Medi-Cal, etc., eligibility is ultimately determined by their local county social service or welfare departments. This county-campus partnership can require weekly communication about individual cases, eligibility updates and feedback on problems, and barriers or best practices. In this study, there was a 13 percentage point decrease in local county social service department partnerships pre-to post. This decrease was likely due to the statewide SSI CalFresh expansion which became a priority for CDSS and county departments. CHC at CSU, Chico has a large CalFresh Outreach staff dedicated to these county-campus partnerships and will continue to build upon existing relationships and establishing new ones over the next two CalFresh Outreach contract years.

Alongside the *BNTRC* intervention, the CSU Office of the Chancellor was providing training and promotions of various basic needs activities like clothing swaps and meal swipe donation programs. The CSU Office of the Chancellor and CHC at CSU, Chico were also providing CalFresh Outreach webinars and materials statewide. These additional promotions and trainings may help explain the increase in these activities during the intervention period and also support the need for continued funding in these areas long term.

Future Directions & Recommendations

System-wide efforts such as the CSU *BNTRC* provide cost effective strategies and resources for long term use and consistency. This *BNTRC* is essentially a repository for best practice resources that are vetted by content experts and that help align efforts across all campuses. These six modules have the added benefit of translating complex and confusing state or federal regulations in a simple and linear fashion. For example, the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) and CalFresh Food EBT are programs that are meant for small businesses or retailers, and as such, campuses have typically struggled to implement on their campus. By compiling previous efforts and shared experiences, CHC was able to create modules for RMP and CalFresh EBT on campus with processes that have proved effective. These modules help prevent additional work, mistakes, and frustration for campus staff that would otherwise lead to poor implementation or even abandonment all together. These *BNTRC* modules pave the way for successful implementation of critical campus basic needs services.

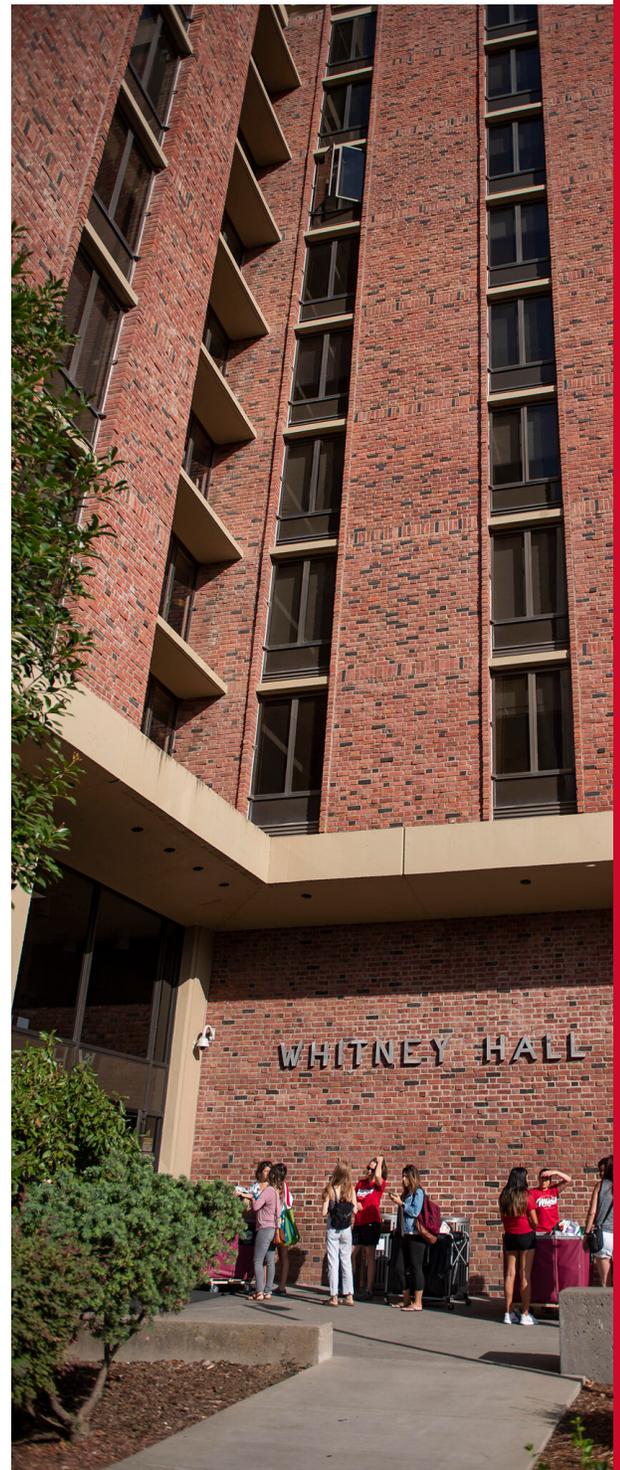
Recommendations from this *BNTRC* project include obtaining new funding for additional training modules such as: emergency housing, county social services partnerships, meal swipe donation program, pantry expansion of kitchen tool and appliance donation, clothing exchange, and self-care for basic needs staff. As well as funding to transition training modules to the CSU Learn or similar platform for tracking and accessibility purposes.

The emergency-housing module was one of the top requested resource by CSU campuses during the pre-survey. Since conducting the pre-survey the need for emergency-housing resources at campuses has only increased as more students face housing insecurity.

Local county social services partnerships were also high on the pre-survey request list by campuses. Considering many campuses reported a decrease in local county social services partnerships in the post-survey this module would be important to incorporate.

Meal swipe donation programs are another best practice some campuses have began to adopt but more CSU students in need could benefit if resources were available on how to implement the program.

CSU campus pantries have made a significant difference to increase accessible food resources for students. The scope of available needed items could be increased to set up donation programs for kitchen tools and small appliances such as rice cookers, instant pots, microwaves, and crock pots. These available tools and small appliances paired with nutrition education on campus could create lasting healthy practices for students.





Clothing exchanges for daily wear and professional attire have been requested by many campuses across the state. There are some campuses who have started a clothing exchange and CHC at CSU, Chico will be able to garner best practices to develop this module in a streamlined process with associated materials.

Good self-care among the basic needs campus teams (i.e. staff, student interns and volunteers) is vital due to the secondary trauma, stress, and burnout associated with this tireless work. A training module providing a holistic approach to self-care will help ensure that the staff are able to provide these basic needs services during stressful times throughout the academic year.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was post-survey participation. Additional limitations include turnover of the basic needs staff or coordinator during the intervention and the lack of knowledge on their basic needs programs. Suggestions for improved participation include participant incentives and survey completion by more than one campus point person.

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