



## Project provides meals to people in need

Campus Kitchen Project includes Gettysburg College students, community volunteers.

By STEVE MARRONI

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One day, they might have chicken taco filling and have to improvise a sort-of fiesta dinner with Spanish rice and vegetables. Another day, they might look at what's in stock and then serve breakfast for dinner.

One thing's for sure, there will be a lot of potatoes, said 20-year-old Melissa Arsenie. They just got a 1,300-pound donation of spuds.

Arsenie is a student coordinator with Gettysburg College's Campus Kitchen Project. The group accepts donations of food from around the community, and then students and volunteers store the food and prepare it to be served to several groups throughout the week.

Students involved with Campus Kitchen found a passion for helping feed the needy on a class trip to work in the DC Central Kitchen in the nation's capital.

They came back from that experience and started a project connected with DC Central Kitchen - the Campus Kitchen Project. It was the first in Pennsylvania colleges and only the 13th in the country, said Kim Davidson, assistant director of the Center for Public Services.

Since starting in late 2007, Campus Kitchen has prepared 2,671 meals. That's 8,204 pounds worth

of food, project members said. February was a typical month and saw 706 pounds of food, or 399 meals.

The project keeps growing and serving more, Arsenie said.

Campus Kitchen is one of the Adams County groups involved in trying to start a county-level food-policy council. The council would consist of several organizations and focus on county food issues like affordability and nutrition. The goal is to close what students call "the food gap," and making sure healthy food is available to people in all walks of life.

Students involved with the project take their job in closing that food gap seriously, volunteering much of their time between classes and homework to gathering and preparing food.

Sometimes while eating in the campus dining hall, Arsenie said, she hopes there are leftovers. Lots of leftovers. The dining hall doesn't throw away food - it donates it to Campus Kitchen.

So do a lot of others, like restaurants, convenience stores, individuals and farmers' markets.

Megan Crowe, another student director with the project, said the great thing about these donations is that they can give people a little more than the typical boxed- and canned-goods donations.

"We have fresh, nutritious food that's prepared that day," she said.

Several programs are regular recipients of their meals. Usually twice per week, Campus Kitchens readies food for Meals on Wheels. They also prepare meals once per week for the Circles of Support program - a program that helps families get out of

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poverty.

Arsenie led a group of volunteers Wednesday as they prepared meals for those two groups.

"You have to get pretty creative," she said.

Meals on Wheels has a standard for meals, including one protein, one starch, one vegetable and one desert, she said. The group tries to strike a similar balance with all of its meals.

Project students and volunteers work out of the kitchen at South Central Community Action Programs on North Stratton Street in Gettysburg. Arsenie heads up a different group of volunteers each time. Plenty of people, who mainly come from student and community groups, volunteer their time.

That night, they had the leftovers from the campus dining hall's chicken tacos. Arsenie kept a large casserole dish of a makeshift "fiesta casserole" warm in the oven, preparing to bring the mixture of chicken, rice and vegetables to the Circles Group.

While the casserole baked, she and a group of volunteers made 23 meals for Meals on Wheels.

Most of it came from a donation from Sheetz. A sandwich, yogurt, a salad and a cookie.

"It's usually pretty good," said Cara Russo, part of the Circles of Support program that has helped her get out of poverty. "They always have a balanced, nutritious meal. It's usually very creative."

She knows the students have to go with what they have and make those menu decisions at the last minute - all while meeting nutrition guidelines.

It's not just having the meal once per week that helps, Russo said. It's learning how to make these

meals. A lot of the people involved in the Circles program are single parents, Russo said. They work long hours and have a lot of running around to do with their kids. There's not a whole lot of time - or money - for the right kind of food.

The Circles program helps them make these healthy choices not only in food but also in financial planning, goal setting and lots of ways to improve one's lot in life.

And the Campus Kitchen helps them with that all-important thing - food. It's food that links the college with the community.

"There is no better way to bond than over food," Arsenie said.

Russo agrees. A lot of time, college students live in their world in and around the campus, she said. They have busy lives and often don't get out into the community.

"They're branching out and becoming part of the community," Russo said.

And the two groups came together and learned from each other. Over a meal.

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