

News at IUPUI

CAMPUS LIFE

Paws' Express repurposes excess food to fight students' food insecurity

BY JUSTIN WHITAKER <../../../../MEDIA-SPECIALISTS/WHITAKER-JUSTIN.HTML>

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Senior Dylan Patterson prepares meals for the new Paws' Express program in the Campus Center kitchen. *Photo by Liz Kaye, Indiana University*

Seeking an opportunity to address a campus issue, two IUPUI organizations have found a better place for excess food than the trash -- students' bellies.

A 2019 study <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5adf505796d455fa43a30309/t/5ca220594785d3b98ad48fc9/1554129005496/Housing-Instability-Assessment-2019_CHIP_March.29.2019.pdf> by the Indiana University Public Policy Institute revealed that 1 in 5 IUPUI students face very low food security, which is defined as "regularly unable to afford adequate food."

To address this issue, the Office of Student Advocacy and Support and the Office of Sustainability have partnered to create Paws' Express, a program that provides IUPUI students with nutritious meals on the go, utilizing repurposed food from campus and community partners such as Second Helpings <<https://www.seconddhelpings.org>> (an Indianapolis hunger relief organization).

The new program is a joint effort between Student Advocacy and Support's Paws' Pantry <<https://studentaffairs.iupui.edu/advocacy-resources/food-and-clothing-services.html>> and Sustainability's Campus Kitchen <<https://sustainability.iupui.edu/engagement/campus-kitchen/index.html>> .

"If students are hungry, they aren't focusing on school, work or whatever they need to do while they are here," said Shaina Lawrence <<https://studentaffairs.iupui.edu/contact/people-directory/student-support-advocacy/lawrence-shaina.html>> , assistant director in the Office of Student Advocacy and Support, which is part of the Division of Student Affairs. "It can be a barrier to them being

successful here. One of the best ways we can try to help students who are under-resourced is through food."

Students accepted to the service receive a Paws' Express pack twice a month. The packs feature a well-balanced meal prepared by Campus Kitchen, a \$10 food voucher from Auxiliary Services and Chartwells for any dining location on campus, a Million Meal Pack <<https://millionmealmovement.org/about/our-story/>> , and information on resources available through Student Advocacy and Support.

The on-the-go meals are made by student volunteers in Campus Kitchen who repurpose the excess food donated from Chartwells (Tower Dining, catering, etc.) with donations from Second Helpings and the campus garden, when it's in season.



On-the-go meals prepared for Paws' Express include a nutritious entree, sides and sometimes even a dessert. *Photo by Liz Kaye, Indiana University*

Addressing food insecurity is not the only issue being confronted through Paws' Express. According to the USDA, food waste is estimated at between 30 and 40 percent <<https://www.usda.gov/foodwaste/faqs>> of the food supply in the United States. Having the opportunity to save edible food on IUPUI's campus is an additional benefit from the program.

"This fantastic initiative designed to provide a resource for the underserved student population is a particular point of pride among the team at Tower Dining," said Daniel McDonald, executive chef at Tower Dining. "The ability of Campus Kitchen and Paws' Pantry to join together and provide an avenue to reach those in need, and to achieve their goal in such a sustainable way, is truly inspiring."

Senior Dylan Patterson and freshman Dayquan Elliott, co-directors of Campus Kitchen who are majoring in sustainability management, are two of the students responsible for preparing the meals every Monday afternoon. The duo spends a few hours in the Campus Center's kitchen planning and preparing the weekly meal.

The menu is ever-changing, but the goal is to provide a main dish such as pasta, meat or soup with sides such as vegetables, mixed fruit, salad and cornbread and, occasionally, even a dessert, like brownies. Never knowing what is going to be donated each week requires some quick creativity and Googling in the kitchen.

"We take what we have and think about what would go well together," Patterson said. "Sometimes we have broth, so we'll take some cans and add a lot of vegetables to it to make it a larger dish. You have to be smart with what you have, and it is a ton of fun being creative."

Neither Patterson nor Elliott had much experience preparing food at home, let alone for a large group of people. But the duo quickly sharpened their skills in the kitchen by leaning on the friendly Campus Center kitchen staff and becoming ServSafe certified <<https://www.servsafe.com>> , an industry standard for food-handling safety.

Their experience shows that when someone has a strong passion for a cause, it's easier to dive in without much prior experience if you have support. "It's really rewarding because every day I come here, I feel good because I know I'm helping someone else," Elliott said. "It's not for me to take credit; it's something I feel like we should be doing as humans. We should be helping one another, giving help where it's needed.

"By doing this, I feel really rewarded. I just hope that if I see a need, I can fill it. Our goal is to start a revolution for hunger relief and make sure we are doing it properly."

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Kaneyia Houston joins Patterson for a busy day in the kitchen as student volunteers for Paws' Express. *Photos by Liz Kaye, Indiana University*

Paws' Express is the latest addition to the services offered by Student Advocacy and Support. Students accepted into the program must already shop at Paws' Pantry, the student-assisted food pantry for students, faculty and staff on campus. For those who still need a bit more assistance, Paws' Express is aiming to help fill that void.

Recognizing the gap and the opportunity to help serve those in tougher circumstances, the idea for Paws' Express began in 2018. Campus Kitchen had previously prepared a side dish for the pantry, but with the creation of Paws' Express, it increased its capabilities to prepare these full meals.

This pilot semester of the program has spots for 50 students, but only around half have been filled.

The partnership between Paws' Pantry and Campus Kitchen for this program complements their joint mission to directly make an impact on IUPUI's campus. Both rely solely on donations.

"We don't have a budget for this; we are utilizing resources on campus that are excess or donated," said Deb Ferguson <<https://sustainability.iupui.edu/about/staff/ferguson-deborah.html>> , IUPUI's assistant director of sustainability and the staff advisor for Campus Kitchen. "We have access to this opportunity and the ability to go into the kitchen to prepare a hot meal and help support what Paws' Pantry is doing."

To volunteer: Visit the [Paws' Pantry <https://studentaffairs.iupui.edu/advocacy-resources/food-and-clothing-services.html>](https://studentaffairs.iupui.edu/advocacy-resources/food-and-clothing-services.html) and [Campus Kitchen <https://campuskitchens.volunteerhub.com/lp/ckiupui/>](https://campuskitchens.volunteerhub.com/lp/ckiupui/) websites.

Lawrence, Patterson, Elliott and Ferguson all expressed gratitude for the cohesion and partnerships among campus stakeholders in helping make this program come to fruition. They credited Chartwells, the Campus Center kitchen, the IU Board of Trustees, Second Helpings, and the complementary relationship between Paws' Pantry and Campus Kitchen. Lawrence added that over \$40,000 in food donations came from the community last year.

"We would not be able to do what we do without our partners on campus and all of the off-campus relationships we have developed," Lawrence said.

With 20 percent of IUPUI students facing very low food security, these campus difference-makers know that more can be done. More food can be repurposed, more students can be served, and funding can be directed. The structure is in place to give back; they just need the help.

"If you want to do something for your community and help IUPUI, we're always taking volunteers," Elliott said. "The more volunteers, the better -- because that means we can feed more people."

Help a student

If you or someone you know is under-resourced, please contact roar@iupui.edu.

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