

Program/ Project [SPOTLIGHT]



Mason students help prepare meals for the Campus Kitchens Project.
[Photo credit:](#) Tyler Tripp

Campus Kitchens at George Mason University is a chapter of The Campus Kitchens Project, a national organization that works to alleviate hunger through engaging universities. Mason's chapter focuses on recovering leftover food from the dining halls on campus and distributing these meals to local homeless shelters.

According to Fairfax County, 62,000 Fairfax County residents live below the poverty line. The Department of Neighborhood and Community Services wrote that with “the high cost of living in the Fairfax-Falls Church area, low-income households find it particularly challenging to meet their basic needs of food, housing, and medical care.”

Candace Garthee, President of Campus Kitchens at Mason, is studying sustainable food and agriculture in part to address this inequity. Campus Kitchens “offers you the opportunity to have a positive impact on campus and in your community by helping to eliminate food waste and feed the hungry,” Garthee said.

This year is a building year for Campus Kitchens. MacKenzie Earl, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator for Campus Kitchens, said “This year we want to make sure we have a strong pool of volunteers, we establish ourselves as a credible group on campus, and we start the seeds for some really impactful programs in the future.”

Campus Kitchens relies on its volunteers to be an effective part of the national effort to eliminate hunger. Anna Rodriguez, Campus Kitchen's Volunteer Coordinator, works to recruit and retain service learners and volunteers. “At Campus Kitchens we try to make all volunteer experiences valuable. We track what our volunteers are passionate about and connect them with opportunities beyond food recovery,” Rodriguez said.

Campus Kitchens has coordinated four food recovery shifts this semester and delivered the food to the Katherine K. Hanley Family Shelter. Leaders in this organization coordinate with the executive chefs from each dining hall to package and label any food that is not served to students.

In addition to food recoveries, Mason's chapter has been working to engage with other chapters and organizations focused on food insecurity. This semester Rodriguez and Earl attended the National Food Recovery Network Dialogue in Washington D.C. “It was truly inspiring to see that at Mason we are only part of a national network of people who are fighting against food insecurity in creative ways,” Earl said.

Campus Kitchens at GMU will also be working with Food for Others, a local nonprofit, on their power pack program. The power pack program helps deliver nonperishable items to elementary school students on free or reduced lunches. These students often struggle to have access to meals throughout the weekend.

“I am so excited about this program because it is literally getting food into the hands of hungry children. How can anyone not want to be involved in that?” Garthee said.