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Contact: Nia Carignan

Associate Director of Public Relations and Communications

978-621-5868 | ncarignan@mwcc.mass.edu

mwcc.edu/press

Mount Wachusett Community College Awarded \$874,420 U.S. Department of Education Grant to Address Basic Needs Insecurities

GARDNER, MA – February 21, 2025 – Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) has been awarded an \$874,420 grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program. This significant funding will support the implementation of the MWCC Village Project, a comprehensive initiative designed to address basic needs insecurities among MWCC’s diverse student population.

The Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education, provides grants to eligible institutions of higher education to support programs that address students' basic needs and report on practices that improve student outcomes. The program aims to advance systemic and sustainable solutions to student basic needs insecurity.

The Department of Education emphasizes that access to essential basic needs can significantly impact post-secondary success. Numerous studies have found that college students often experience basic needs insecurity, which can hinder their academic progress and completion.

The MWCC Village Project aligns with the program's objectives by implementing a comprehensive plan to coordinate cross-agency collaboration to provide basic needs resources to underrepresented students. The project will provide direct services in food assistance, health (including physical health,

mental health, behavioral health, and trauma), and childcare. Through cross-agency partnerships, the project will also address housing, transportation, and technology challenges.

With approximately 3,000 degree-seeking students annually, MWCC serves a student body in which 68% of historically underrepresented students face challenges related to basic needs such as food, housing, and health care. The MWCC Village Project will address these challenges by collaborating with government and community organizations to provide critical resources and services.

“This grant represents a transformative opportunity for MWCC to strengthen our commitment to student success by addressing the fundamental needs that can hinder academic achievement,” said MWCC President, James Vander Hooven. “The MWCC Village Project reflects our dedication to ensuring that every student has the support they need to thrive both inside and outside the classroom.”

The MWCC Village Project will focus on:

- **Food and Hygiene Assistance:** Expanding the MWCC Food Pantry to ensure access to nutritious food and essential supplies.
- **Health Services:** Enhancing physical, mental, behavioral health, and trauma support, with particular attention to addressing service gaps at the Leominster Campus.
- **Child Care Support:** Support the Child Watch program, which offers free childcare for 2-3 hours to enable students to attend classes, study, or meet with advisors.
- **Housing, Transportation, and Technology:** Collaboration with community partners, guided by a Basic Needs Advisory Board, community needs assessment and asset mapping will identify and fill gaps in services.

“By securing this grant, MWCC joins other institutions in a national effort to support students' basic needs, enhancing their ability to succeed academically and beyond,” stated Jason Zelesky, Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students.

The MWCC Village Project aligns with national priorities by leveraging public benefits programs and implementing a campus-wide strategy to address mental health needs. By integrating evidence-based practices, the initiative ensures that students have access to essential resources and the support necessary for academic and personal success.

For more information about the MWCC Village Project and its impact, please contact MWCC Vice President of Student Affairs, Dean of Students, Jason Zelesky.

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