

Network Reduces Campus Waste

Campus group recovers meals from dining outlets, donates to women's shelter

<http://utdmercury.com/network-reduces-campus-food-waste/>

The Food Recovery Network is a student-led movement against hunger, aiming to transform food waste to food recovery. They recover excess food across communities and donate them to people who are deprived of nutritional food.

The national organization is spread across 44 states and D.C., operating through nearly 230 student chapters across U.S. universities. At UTD, the Food Recovery Network is affiliated with the Sustainability Club, and they have volunteers to pick up food from dining locations at UTD and deliver it to Hope's Door, a nonprofit organization in Plano.

Since its inception in 2016, the FRN donated nearly 960 pounds of food, equivalent to 1,280 meals, collected from dining areas across the university.

Mathematics senior Matthew Salm is the founder of the FRN at UTD. He had prior experience in working on sustainability projects as an intern at UTD's Office of Sustainability.

In 2015, Chartwells, UTD's dining service provider, agreed to Salm's idea of putting down food wastage facts on every paper napkin in the dining hall as a part of the Office of Sustainability. Salm said this would raise student awareness of the amount of food wasted. Salm later put forward an idea to implement food recovery at Chartwells in October 2015. After a series of meetings and drafting proposals, the idea was approved.

"Just the recognition that waste existed and we should try to redirect to the people we can," Salm said. "Put less food on your plate and you will probably end up wasting less and that ends up being good for the environment and for the people."

Psychology junior and president of the Sustainability Club Kiara Dandridge, heads the FRN and has been involved with the organization for three semesters.

"We started with recovering food from Einstein's Bagels on campus and Dining Hall West, and at the beginning of the past academic year, we expanded to the Student Union," Dandridge said. "Occasionally, we also recover food from Chartwells' catering off campus."

According to a The Guardian report released in July 2016, 50 percent of all produce in the U.S. is thrown away.

"It is important for people to try not to contribute to this statistic," Dandridge said, referring to The Guardian's report.

Dandridge herself has delivered food from campus to the nonprofit several times.

"I feel like it gives me an opportunity to work directly for something I care about," she said. "From the environmental aspect to the human compassion aspect, it is a great way to directly impact my community."

The food delivered by FRN reaches individuals and families sheltered at Hope's Door. This nonprofit organization runs a 90-day program for those in danger, mostly women and children who are affected by family violence and need shelter.

Melanie O'Brien, director of community relations at Hope's Door, mentioned the FRN has helped out over 500 individuals.

"Not only is it helping to feed and sustain them in a healthy way, but it is also educating them in what is healthy for them. It also saves them time, if they have jobs and get home, they don't have time to make a healthy meal for their families. It is a great example of sustainability," O'Brien said. "Students at UTD really care about the community and making a difference, and it is great to see that altruistic nature in college students."