Tracking the Numbers on Basic Needs Insecurity: The Good, Bad, and Ugly

Micheal Brown, ASUM Outreach Coordinator

Last fall, some of you may have participated in the Real College Survey via email. The survey is annually conducted by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University to track basic needs insecurity at college campuses around the country. The results of these surveys have provided a wake-up call for university institutions and community stakeholders charged with overseeing the well-being of college students. Basic needs insecurity has become a growing problem nationwide.

The good news is that the numbers tracking basic needs insecurity among students at the University of Montana have improved slightly from last year. In 2018, 42% of respondents reported food insecurity within the last 30 days. In 2019, only 37% of respondents reported food insecurity within the last 30 days. In 2018, 55% of respondents reported housing insecurity within the previous year. In 2019, only 44% of respondents reported housing insecurity within the previous year. In 2018, 28% of respondents reported experiencing homelessness within the previous year. In 2019, only 23% of respondents reported experiencing homelessness within the previous year. In all, 67% of respondents reported experiencing some form of basic needs insecurity in 2018. In 2019, only 58% of respondents reported experiencing some form of basic needs insecurity.

The bad news is that the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among students at the University of Montana tracks above the national average. The rate of food insecurity among UM students is 4 points above the average at other four-year institutions. The rate of housing insecurity is 9 points above average. And the rate of homelessness is 7 points above average.

The University of Montana and the Missoula community at large are clearly behind other college communities in addressing the problem of basic needs insecurity. Part of the problem in reaching out to these vulnerable populations is the stigma attached to falling behind in the race to afford basic housing and adequate food. A shockingly large number of people suffering from basic needs insecurity fail to reach out for help. In 2019, only 13% of food-insecure students accessed SNAP benefits. Only 3% of students experiencing homelessness accessed housing benefits. This represents a slight drop in the number of students accessing these services in 2018. In 2018, 14% of food-insecure students accessed SNAP benefits and 4% of students experiencing homelessness accessed housing benefits.

By any stretch of the imagination, we have our work cut out for us in ensuring that the basic needs of the student body at the University of Montana are properly attended to. We at the ASUM Renter Center are committed to addressing these issues and assisting any students who find themselves falling between the cracks. Struggling students should not feel ashamed about reaching out for help. Our Food Pantry recently celebrated its first anniversary and looks forward to continuing its mission of providing free nutritional food to students and community members in need. Additionally, our agency is dialed into larger community efforts to address the issue of homelessness in Missoula and can connect students with the proper resources to ameliorate their housing situation. If you are one of the vulnerable students represented in these statistics, we invite you to visit our office in the University Center.

Welcome our New Neighborhood Ambassador, Rhys McKinstry! He is a senior at UM studying Geology and Geography. All the way from Washington tri-cities, he is excited to work with neighbors in the University District!
Don’t Assume You Know When You Lease is Up!

Logan Olson, ASUM Legal Services

You are about to finish up your last year of undergrad. As soon as Bodnar hands you your fake diploma at commencement and the lease runs on your party pad, you’re getting out of Missoula to start your dream job. Just as you are about to hop in the U-Haul to leave Missoula in the dust, the postman delivers a letter from your landlord which reads: “Absent 30-day written notice of termination of the rental agreement, your lease has been extended pursuant to the mutually agreed upon default option.” Now your lease has been extended for another year, and you didn’t do a damn thing to stop it (or start it).

You just fell victim to the “default extension period” clause, also known as the “default renewal” provision. Most rental agreements contain this provision, and understanding it can save you both time and money.

What is a “default extension period” or “default renewal” provision?

A “default extension period” or “default renewal” provision is part of a rental agreement. The provision outlines what will happen at the end of the rental agreement if 1) the landlord doesn’t provide 30-day written notice of his or her intent to terminate the agreement; and 2) the tenant doesn’t provide 30-day written notice of his or her intent to terminate the agreement.

What happens if neither party sends 30-day written notice of termination prior to my move-out date?

Your landlord can automatically renew your rental agreement for the length of time articulated in the default renewal provision. This could mean your agreement is renewed for anywhere from one month to one year.

What if my rental agreement doesn’t contain a default renewal provision?

Per Montana statute, if neither you nor your landlord has sent the 30-day notice discussed above, your landlord can renew your rental agreement for one month, and then on a month-to-month basis after that.

What should I do if I want to move out at the end of my rental agreement?

30 days before your move-out date you should keep your eyes peeled for a notice of termination from your landlord. If you are concerned that your landlord is not going to send this notice, you can send the notice yourself.

I received a letter from my landlord saying my lease has been extended but I want to leave. What should I do?

Consult your rental agreement. Most agreements contain a provision detailing what to do to terminate the agreement early. Normally, to terminate a rental agreement early you must pay an amount of money detailed in your agreement. If this is an unpalatable option, you should contact an attorney with experience in landlord-tenant law.

ASUM Legal Services offers low-cost legal assistance to University of Montana students. If you need legal advice and/or representation, please visit our website at www.umt.edu/asum/legalservices and fill out the applicable intake form. Or call us to schedule an appointment at 406.243.6213.

DISCLAIMER: The contents of this publication are not legal advice. There is no guarantee contents are current and up-to-date, or that they apply to your specific situation.

Adopt Me! : Missoula Traffic Circles

Marley Merchen, Neighborhood Ambassador

Ever wonder what the small circles in the middle of the road are? They aren’t tiny roundabouts — they are Traffic Circles! The City of Missoula uses traffic circles as a means of traffic safety. There are 45 Traffic Circles in Missoula. Neighbors and organizations can adopt these circles as part of a program run through the Office of Neighborhoods to help to maintain them..

Adoption Application

To begin the process of adoption you will need to fill out the application online by going to the City of Missoula Office of Neighborhoods page on the city’s website. Here you will be able to gain more information about the program as well as apply to adopt a traffic circle near you.

Applying for Grant Money

After you have adopted the traffic circle you can apply to a grant to help you with the costs of maintenance. These grants can be used to get supplies such as plants and mulch but cannot be used to buy tools.

Don’t forget to certify it

Another amazing thing you can do with your traffic circle is to get it certified as a wildlife habitat through the National Wildlife Federation. It’s a super easy process all you need is cover, a place to raise young, water, and food. It ensures you have all the pieces necessary for insects or birds to call your traffic circle home.

After you adopt a traffic circle all you will need to do is take care of it. This is a fun way to get involved with our local community and help keep the Garden City looking nice.

Above: Neighborhood Ambassador Chloe working to clean up a sign on adopted traffic circle; Below, Butterfly peddler providing water for insects.