Surviving College with Food Stamps

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by Ashley Goforth

Recently, I've met a number of college students who are relying on food stamps in order to make ends meet and have put a lot of thought into the connection between being able to eat and being able to learn. Many students qualify for participation in the Food Stamp Program (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP). When I think of food assistance, my first thought is not college students, but the truth is, if you are hungry, you can't learn.

I recently learned more about college students relying on food stamps when I met Carlotta – a NYC student living in Brooklyn who has graciously allowed us into her experience as a food stamp recipient. Here is a short interview:

How did you come to apply for food stamps?
I was working as a massage therapist and going back to school. My schedule varied tremendously and sometimes I would have zero massages, which meant I earned no money. My friends and roommates told me about the program. After I heard more about a friend going through the process, I decided to contact the Food Bank for some help, and they took me through the pre-screening process. I was surprised that I qualified for food stamps as a student, but hearing it was an easy process convinced me to apply. Having the extra help each month relieved my anxiety about affording food.

How long does your allotment last during the month, and what do you do when it runs out?
From the beginning, I tried stretching my allotment through the first three weeks. Then I'd have enough money to pay for food when it ran out. I was living pretty poorly before so I was already used to being careful with my money.

Do you know of other students who would qualify for food stamps who are not taking advantage of the program?
Yes, many of us in my program are making less than $1,100 a month. I'm sure many of them qualify and aren't in the program.

If you struggle to afford food, food stamps may be just the thing to make ends meet. Our food stamp information call center (212.894.8060) is available throughout the work week, providing regular access to food stamp specialists who can conduct pre-screenings and answer questions. Call us today!