Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: From distributing food at a food pantry to manning the reception desk at a homeless shelter, research shows that volunteering has positive effects on a person's mental and physical health. April is National Volunteer Month in America. It's dedicated to honoring volunteers and encouraging volunteerism. I'm Emily Yeap.

My guest today is Alex Johnson, community-engaged learning director in the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) at Missouri State University. He joins me to discuss volunteerism and the latest effort on campus to combat hunger among students.

Alex Johnson: I believe folks should make service a part of their lives, because each person has unique strengths that they can contribute to the community and to make a difference. When people serve, they are able to bring their lived experiences to the table and build connections and networks with others, so they're increasing the social capital in communities, and so a more connected community is a stronger one.

Emily Yeap: Johnson believes there are countless benefits to volunteering.

Alex Johnson: It touches areas of our social, emotional, physical, professional lives, so we're able to learn about each other and about others through service experiences. At Missouri State, we encourage students to serve because they're able to enhance their future career readiness skills and test those skills. Students enrolled in service-learning courses are able to utilize their academic knowledge to address community issues. For example, it could be an elementary education student creating educational programs with schoold or a nursing student being part of the vision screening program.

Alex Johnson: Also, local professionals who give their time and expertise to the community are really valuable to agencies. Whether it's a local accountant serving as a mentor for a Northwest project in their financial literacy program or a dietitian working with community gardens to promote healthy food access, everybody's contributing to the greater good.

Emily Yeap: How and where can you start volunteering?

Alex Johnson: Advice that I give students at Missouri State is to think about what they're passionate about, the contribution they'd like to make, the skills that they'd like to learn, and things like that. From there, I'd suggest utilizing a few resources in the community to get connected to meaningful experiences. Some of those include the Springfield Community Focus Report, which provides information

about our community's strengths and challenges, to find and register for service opportunities near you, Givepulse.com is a great resource, and that includes one-time service opportunities or consistent ongoing opportunities. Then, of course, people are more than welcome to visit us at the Center for Community Engagement or people can get in contact with me.

Emily Yeap: One new effort at Missouri State that community members can support is the Bear Pantry, a partnership between the CCE and the Drew Lewis Foundation. It's located in the CCE's office in the Plaster Student Union, Room 131.

Alex Johnson: The Bear Pantry is in existence to address on-campus hunger. It's meant to support faculty, staff and students at Missouri State facing food insecurities. It began officially in January of 2019, so we're still really new. A report came out in late 2018 from the Wisconsin Hope Lab that communicated that about 36% of college students face food insecurity, and that rate is higher amongst under-represented students. We want to make sure that, as a university, we're supporting students to their graduation. Food is a really essential piece of learning, and so we're providing that for them.

Emily Yeap: Any help is welcomed.

Alex Johnson: We are always collecting nonperishable goods, so whether that is food or hygiene items, folks can create a donation drive with us, and we'll help them make that successful. They're also able to donate, whether it's through cash or check. Donations can be made out to the Drew Lewis Foundation, and we can utilize those funds to purchase emergency food. Eventually, we would like to purchase refrigeration for our pantry. We're open from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, and folks are welcome to come over anytime to tour the pantry. On our website, missouristate.edu/cce, we've got a place where people can sign up for events that we'll post.

Emily Yeap: To find out more about the CCE and the Bear Pantry, visit missouristate.edu/cce. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.