Shannon Blair, a 2018 graduate of Georgia College, who’ll receive her master’s in criminal justice in May. Blair is in her school’s social service director, charged with the “mental wellness” of 78 residents.

She found out about the nursing home shortage from Shawnee O’Neal, a fellow Georgia College graduate.

“The struggle for protection is everywhere, but this has given our facility one less worry in the middle of the crisis,” Blair said. “Many people think about hospitals, but they forget the nursing homes are struggling too.”

“With this donation, we’re able to put full residents on the frontlines and not have to think about how to conserve masks,” she said.

The Helping Hands Hardship Fund was originally conceived with unusual situations who need a helping hand. With the COVID-19 crisis, University Advancement, Student Life and the Division of Student Life came together and made a decision to utilize the fund to aid students who face significant financial hardships now and in the coming months.

This biggest mood we saw was for “money to buy food,” said Dr. Shawn Brooks, vice president for Student Life. “We had students report they were only eating once a day, because they didn’t have money to buy food. One student wrote about being down to her last box of cereal.”

More than $300,000 has been raised for the Helping Hands Hardship fund, but the need is greater.

“The amount of need is immeasurable,” said Brooks. “Most students are taking only part of their overall need, as they know funds are limited.”

To date, students’ needs have significantly exceeded the amount of money raised to help address the distress.

“The Division of Student Life is working to identify and immediately turn action to relieve the most pressing issues, and to find aid for all of our students,” said Monica Delius, vice president, University Advancement.

The idea of Helping Hands stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic and the related move to online education for Georgia College students.

“Dr. Shawn Brooks and Student Life recognized that some GC students may be facing extreme hardships, because they were no longer employed, in local businesses, did not have access to technology needed in an online environment or couldn’t afford the costs associated with moving from campus housing to off-campus housing,” said Delius. “Student Life reached out to Advancement and the Office of Financial Aid, and we identified this fund as being exactly right for this type of crisis.”

Student Life distributed a form to all GC students to self-identify if they need help. The Office of Financial Aid works with Student Life to identify and qualify students who need assistance and award financial help.

“These uncertain times, having a sense of financial security will enable students to engage fully in the online learning process and to succeed,” said Delius. “It’s always our goal in University Advancement to ensure that our students do not have to worry about finances, that they can concentrate on being the best students and future community leaders they can be.”

Donors have until May 1 to make their Helping Hands gift. Any size donation is appreciated.

“My biggest hope is that we have been able to make a difference in students’ lives with the Helping Hands fund,” said Brooks. “Like everyone else, I hope and pray for a quick end to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Going to the Helping Hands initiative is purposeful giving,” said Pam Booker, ‘99, president-elect of the Alumni Board of Directors in September of 2019. “I would say my toda year in Chief was about ‘Supporting GC students during this time displays unity. It shows students they are not alone and promotes perseverance through challenging times. The Georgia College community is strong as ever.”

“Supporting GC students during this time displays unity. It shows students they are not alone and promotes perseverance through challenging times. The Georgia College community is strong as ever. Giving to the Helping Hands initiative is purposeful giving,” said Pam Booker, ‘99, president-elect of the Alumni Board of Directors in September of 2019. “I would say my toda year in Chief was about strengthening a ‘sense of community’ and providing physical and mental health relief for students and their families alike in the midst of the pandemic.”

In order to help Georgia College students suffering financial hardships, visit: crowdfunder gc.edu.

President Dr. Doreen Sams and Kelly Massey, conference co-chairs, and Cofer worked with Holly Craft, digital archival at the Dillard Russell Library, to put the undergraduate research conference online. In the short time since they began, they’ve decided to make it available for anyone to view.

“There are still some challenges ahead,” Cofer said. “But we’re able to keep moving with this conference, despite the conditions.”

“Though this is not an opportunity to see what works online,” he added. “It might open up some new avenues for us going into the future.”

The process to be accepted to Georgia College’s conference was waived this year for students who had other conferences canceled. Some hope this will result to more students presenting.

Meet some of our May 2020 graduates as we highlight their many accomplishments.