

Freshman Student Shares His Feeding Tampa Bay Volunteer Experience

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Departing from high school and beginning upon the journey of being a first-year student at the the University of South Florida (USF) tends to be full of unprecedented experiences and learning opportunities. And yet like many others, I find myself in a situation that requires I start this journey in a world that is seemingly changing by the day. That is why as I prepare to begin at USF and continue to increase my understanding of the broad issue of food insecurity, particularly in Tampa Bay, the clearer it becomes that even in uncertain times, the plight of hunger remains ever-consistent. With 1.3 million of our neighbors lacking consistent access to nutritious foods, I am grateful to be volunteering alongside Feeding Tampa Bay (FTB) in the fight to end hunger. So, when asked how a new college student can realistically take on an issue as widespread as food insecurity while facing the challenges presented by a global pandemic, I believe that commitment, particularly to our cause of ending hunger in Tampa Bay, is our greatest asset.

It has been said that commitment is what transforms a promise into reality. That it is the words that speak boldly of our intentions, and the actions that speak louder than those words. And for Feeding Tampa Bay and its partners such as the USF Center for Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities (CAFSHC), those words are the goal of creating a hunger free Tampa by 2025. Upon learning about this goal, I was amazed that such a monumental achievement could be accomplished in the near future. And while the incredible work of the donors and volunteers that make that goal attainable certainly impressed me, I was also intrigued by the incredible amount of work that is still to be done before Tampa Bay can truly be hunger-free. For me, I know that this means continuing and growing in my efforts to give of my time and resources, while encouraging and hopefully inspiring others to do the same. In volunteering with FTB's Trinity Café, I have seen volunteers and coordinators remain committed to serving each guest a nutritious meal with dignity, even though meals were only available for pick-up during the pandemic. Or take in to account the organization's programs such as "Cereal for Summer" continuing to be carried out despite the current national situation. These, among other examples, display the reality that despite frequent changes in rules, regulations, and new social norms, it is vital that now, more than ever, we remain steadfast in our efforts to provide a basic need to those who are not in a position to provide it for themselves.



Although our commitment to our work may take on various forms, we must remember the goal that has already been created for facing, and ending, hunger in Tampa Bay. It has been said that when you are considering stopping, or even slowing down, you must remember why you began in the first place. I believe that is particularly relevant in these difficult times a new college student attempting to help lessen the reach of food insecurity. Now more than ever, I am compelled to step up in not only supporting Feeding Tampa Bay and their direct giving, but also in working with Dr. David Himmelgreen and CAFSHC in their efforts to provide research and education regarding the issue of food insecurity. So, although the nature of uncertainty may be to entice us to quit, it is in times like these, that we must commit.