

FEED THE CHILDREN

By Ashley South

Cara Yavaliollah, Monthly Giving Specialist at Feed My Starving Children, started as a volunteer in 6th grade with her youth group as part of a food packing team. She knew she wanted to make a career at Feed My Starving Children from that first experience many years ago.

Cara grew up in Crystal Lake, Illinois. "I had no perspective of hungry people. I grew up not realizing the global need," she told us. After she attended that initial packing session, she said a staff member sat her group down on benches in a meeting room and told them how many meals their group prepared and how many people would be fed because of their efforts. The staff member then showed them pictures of a garbage dump in Nicaragua. He asked, "What would you do if you had to go to the dump every day to look for food?" The raw image of families rummaging through garbage to live stayed with Cara. That moment was the first time her eyes were opened to people living drastically different lives than her own.

Feed My Starving Children fights world hunger through its special MannaPack™ meal formulas that were developed by food science and nutrition professionals. These meals are shipped to partner organizations

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in 105 countries throughout the world. The partner organizations are mission and humanitarian organizations on the ground in these countries and distribute the shipments of food to school lunch programs, medical clinics, families, and orphanages. Food assistance is a vital component in the partnership with humanitarian organizations, as food security is the foundation for so much more. A dependable food source allows their partners to devote resources to education, health care, agriculture, and micro business.

After college, Cara started part-time on the food packing team. There, volunteers work as teams in two-hour shifts hand-packing the meal formula: rice, soy, dried vegetables, and a blend of vitamins and minerals into bags that are then sealed, boxed, placed on pallets, and shipped to the partner organizations. Cara’s role was to help run packing sessions. Prior to the pandemic, she tells us that they would see sessions with over 250 people. Today, the packing sites are at 30% capacity, but the organization found a way to host sessions that are safe during the pandemic. In the 2020/21 fiscal year, 267,467,147 meals were provided and 732, 786 children fed.

The packing room is the heart of the experience and provides a tangible way to see your effort and be a part of change. It is a popular event for corporate volunteer groups, scout groups, church groups. The average person packs a box of food, which is 216 meals. Each meal costs 24 cents and each box costs \$52. Feed My Starving Children is run completely on donations—no government funding. Partners pay for shipping. Monetary donations are also accepted: \$88 feeds a child for a year and 86% of all donations go into the feeding program.

Cara recently moved from the packing team to her current position. She realized when she started part-time that she wanted to stay and find full-time work within the organization that touched her soul. Cara has been a staff member for nearly four years, but of course has been part of the organization for over a decade.

Cara tells us that she has been very grateful to be working for Feed My Starving Children because of their message of hope, even in the hardest of times.

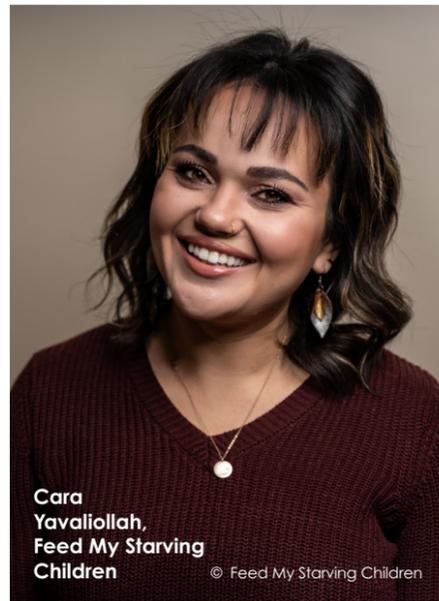


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