



UNITED WAY
Northeastern
Minnesota

Youth United
CONTEST

2025-2026

One of the biggest challenges in my community is food insecurity, and it affects many families, including my own. Hunger is something people do not always talk about, especially when they are working hard and still struggling to afford food. It impacts much more than just meals. It affects health, education, and overall tranquility, and it is something too many families quietly deal with every day.

Growing up, there were times when my family relied on food assistance just to get by. Even though my mom worked multiple jobs, it still was not enough to cover everything we needed. I have personally been on food stamps, and that experience showed me how unfair the system can feel. Watching someone work so hard and still struggle to put food on the table is discouraging. No family should have to choose between paying bills and buying groceries, but many families in my community face that decision.

Food insecurity is made worse by the lack of affordable food options where I live. We only have one grocery store, which means higher prices and fewer choices. With inflation driving food costs up, families are struggling more than ever. Items that used to be affordable now feel out of reach, making it hard to maintain a healthy and consistent diet. For families living paycheck to paycheck, even small price increases can have a huge impact.

I have also seen how serious this issue is through volunteering at a local food shelf. While helping out, I noticed how quickly the shelves emptied. That alone showed me how many people rely on these resources. In my community, food shelves are not just a temporary help. They are a necessity. Volunteering opened my eyes to how hunger affects people of all ages and backgrounds.

Schools also play a major role in addressing hunger, which shows just how widespread the problem is. My school has a food storeroom for students who do not know where their next meal will come from, and all students receive free breakfast and lunch. For some kids, those meals are the main reason they come to school, and sometimes the only food they eat all day. Hunger directly affects students' ability to focus and learn, making access to food an important part of student success.

Organizations like United Way of Northeastern Minnesota are important in helping communities like mine. United Way supports food shelves, school meal programs, and other community efforts that make sure families can access nutritious food. These programs help reduce stress for families and allow kids to focus on learning instead of worrying about being hungry.

Beyond immediate food support, United Way also works to address the deeper causes of food insecurity. This includes helping families access benefits like SNAP, supporting job training opportunities, and supporting better access to affordable food in rural areas. Long-term solutions are just as important as emergency assistance.

Food drives already help in my community, and United Way could continue strengthening these efforts by organizing and expanding them. Bringing together schools, businesses, and volunteers also helps reduce the

stigma around asking for help. Needing assistance does not mean failure. It means people are doing their best in difficult circumstances.

Experiencing food insecurity has shaped how I see my community and my role in it. It has taught me the importance of compassion, speaking up, and supporting one another. Organizations like United Way of Northeastern Minnesota give communities the tools to help each other and turn hardship into hope. With continued effort and cooperation, we can work toward a future where access to food is not a privilege, but a basic right.