



**UNITED WAY**  
Northeastern  
Minnesota

*Youth United*  
**CONTEST**

**2025-2026**

Every community has needs that can be easy to overlook unless someone takes the time to understand them. In International Falls, one of the biggest needs I notice is the lack of support for people dealing with grief or social isolation, especially widowed adults and senior citizens. Many of these people live alone or are adjusting to major life changes. Although our community is connected, there are not enough chances for older adults to come together where they can share experiences, make friends, and feel less alone. This is a challenge we should be able to tackle.

My idea is to create a monthly grief support and social connection potluck for widowed community members, senior citizens, or anyone who just needs more companionship. This program would have the goal of providing emotional support for those coping with loss or loneliness and creating a good social experience. A warm meal and conversation can make a huge difference in someone's life. These gatherings could include not only food but also activities/ themed events that give people something to look forward to each month. The simple act of showing up and spending time together can reduce isolation and build friendships.

United Way or other organizations could help address this challenge by assisting with supporting outreach. Youth organizations could also play a key role. As a member of the Minnesota Honor Society we could volunteer by preparing food, setting up the event space, welcoming guests, or leading activities. This way senior citizens will benefit, and high schoolers will be able to connect with them.

Participation and growth are important, so we need to promote the program. We could advertise through the Minnesota Honor Society, partner with the local radio station for announcements, and visit the senior center to gather input. By asking them what they would like to see, such as potlucks, board games, crafts, or themed gatherings, we can build the program around their interests. Meeting once a month creates consistency without overwhelming volunteers or participants, and it gives people something to look forward to. This means a lot to me because it's all about connection. Even in a friendly community like International Falls, many people quietly struggle with feelings of loneliness or loss. Sometimes what makes the biggest difference in someone's life is not a complicated solution but simple kindness. It would be great to have a monthly gathering that provides comfort to community members who need it most.

As I'm preparing for the future and planning to study Radiologic Technology at Lake Superior College, it reminds me that being a part of the healthcare system requires more than just technical skills. It's about compassion, listening to, and supporting people when they are vulnerable. This project would allow me to start practicing those values now in my own community. This is how we can truly make an impact.

**CONNOR TOMCZAK**  
Falls High School