



The Problem

Children in Wisconsin are facing rising hunger and food insecurity – 20% of the state's children are food insecure. That is one in five children. In Jefferson County, 3,220 children are food insecure, which is 19% of the population ([Feeding America](#)). Beyond the problems that hunger poses to child development and physical health, hunger also raises the risk of youth developing mental health problems. Hunger is linked to anxiety, depression, panic disorder, and suicidal thinking ([OCMH](#)).

The Solution

The Mill is a food pantry available to all students and their families at no cost in the Lake Mills School District. The Mill provides essential groceries and household items on a weekly basis. Items include breakfast foods, quick meals, fresh produce, and hygiene products, and the service is anonymous.

A student organization, Interact, works with school staff to run The Mill. Sponsored globally by Rotary International, the Interact club at Lake Mills has a subcommittee focused on The Mill. These students not only work hands-on in the pantry, but also work to raise money for The Mill and to bring on local sponsors. "Our local business sponsors play an important role in providing support for their community members," said Kirsten Steinke, Lake Mills High School Math Teacher and Advisor to The Mill. "Our student committee came up with various sponsorship levels and did the work to contact our local businesses and encourage them to sponsor The Mill. Their sponsorship and support allows us to not only purchase necessary items that are not donated, like perishable items, but also shows that within our community we want to support each other and give back."

The Process

Families place their orders for The Mill by noon on Tuesdays with pick up of items on Thursday afternoon at the high school. Families place orders online using their child's 5-digit lunch code. When the orders are fulfilled the family receives a text message with their bin number for pick up. Bins are placed outside the main office at the high school. To ensure



The Mill is a collaborative effort between students, staff, and the community at Lake Mills School District.

complete confidentiality, high school students who may pick up their family's bin can identify a different location for pick up.

Many hands are involved in The Mill's process. Staff and Interact students stock items, and staff pull the orders on Wednesdays. The school's Transitions students and their special education teachers pack the bins. Interact students and whoever is available on Thursday at the pick-up time carry the bins to the main office. "It is all hands on deck, and it is so nice to see Transitions students working side-by-side with the Interact members," Steinke said. "There is such a shared sense of accomplishment, and the confidence that our Transition students build is outstanding."

The Results

The Mill provides bins for 12-15 families on a weekly basis, and there are 32 phone numbers representing total families on The Mill's list. At each monthly Interact meeting Steinke shares the numbers of families served with the students. "Some of our members are surprised that food insecurity is a reality for many of our students," she said. "Unfortunately it is, but it is a problem that anyone can help with, and I am so proud of our students, school district, and community for what they are doing to make The Mill available for families in our district."