

Growing in Community: Jordyn's Story



My name is Jordyn Riegle. Right now, I'm a 22 year old student at MSU and I'll be graduating in May with a Bachelor's Degree in Nutritional Science and a minor in Health Promotion; I'm also a line cook and an intern with Allen Neighborhood Center.

During my sophomore year, I found out about ANC and heard about a volunteer opportunity with one of its awesome initiatives, the Allen Market Place Exchange. This was in the fall of 2013, so it's when the program was first starting. Lynn Brown had been the main person creating the website and getting the program started, so it was cool to work directly with her on this brand new program. I was just learning about the farm-to-table movement and starting to cook more, and I was becoming interested in restaurants – it was just pretty amazing to see the whole distribution part of the food system. I volunteered for about 3 months.

The next summer I actually got my first job as a cook at Harper's - you gotta start somewhere. At the same time, I also had an internship here with ANC. I was the Sparrow Mini-Market Coordinator, which is a project of the Allen Farmers Market. It was really fun – I got to have a supervisory position that was a lot of responsibility, but between this experience, my volunteer work with the Exchange, my education, and my job, I was able to truly see our food system. Then in February of 2015, I saw that there was an internship position with the Exchange, under Egypt Krohn. It sounded really interesting, and was a great way to become more involved and have a more in-depth understanding of the Exchange. I've been here ever since.

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My experience here has affected my life in a lot of different ways. There's the professional aspect, where I've been able to see just how an organization/office/nonprofit functions. It's so opposite from my job as a line cook – a bit more professional. It's really helped me grow in a lot of ways; I feel more prepared to take on a more professional job when I graduate. Then there's the community aspect. I probably would have never left East Lansing as a student if I didn't have to come out to the Eastside for this internship. It's opened my eyes to how cool Lansing is and the sense of community over here. And then there's the cultural aspect – food culture – where I've been able to see all these farms grow, and it helps me understand the importance of ANC's work. It's been really neat.

I see the work of the Exchange as the connection between the local food system and the business sector of Lansing. It's the easy route to just source from Sysco or GFS, but really, when you invest your money in the local food system, you're investing in the entire community. The money stays in Lansing. You can see that in other places like Grand Rapids and Traverse City – huge, booming local food systems – and it becomes a source of pride. I really think Lansing should have that. I see the Exchange bringing that to this community. I see it bringing that local pride in a more distinct form: you can taste it.

This place truly is a food hub – whether it's signing up for a CSA share, gardening, signing up for food assistance, getting free food, the farmers market, the Exchange – it's full circle. The staff here are hilarious and outgoing, and always down to have fun. It used to be kind of hard for me because I'm always so serious about work and school, but then I come here and it's a complete change of pace; it's nice. It has changed the way I view how work should be. I'm really not sure what I'm going to do after I graduate, but I would love to work for another food hub.

By donating and supporting the Allen Neighborhood Center, you're investing in the Lansing community. You're investing in a place that is solely focused on improving the welfare of Lansing's people. Allen Neighborhood Center – you know, really, I think it's the heart of the community. I mean, we grow food, we make food, we distribute free food, we sell food – food's really what brings people together more than anything else. Then there's the part where we do everything we can to help people make it in life. I mean what more can you ask for with the Outreach and Engagement office, the facilities you can rent out to further your business, all the free counseling services through the Exchange...It's just really cool how every aspect of this place is focused around improving people's lives. And that's really what this place has been for me – a life improver.