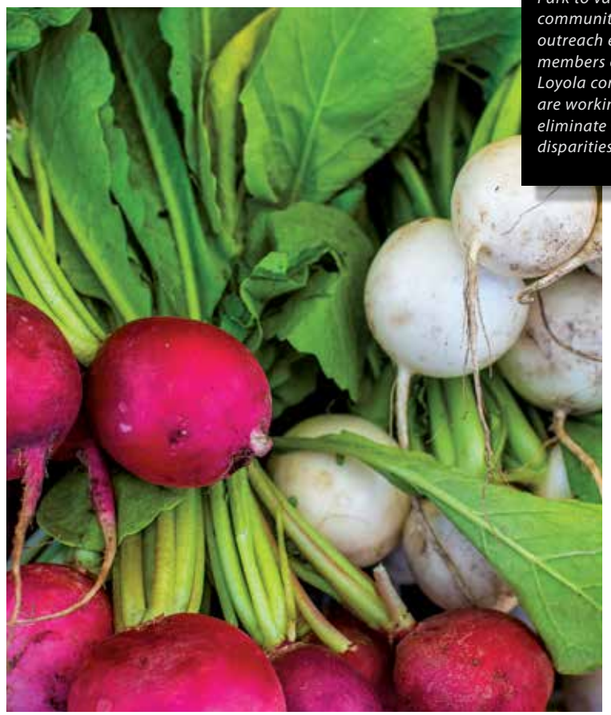

From the Farmers Market in Rogers Park to various community outreach efforts, members of the Loyola community are working to eliminate food disparities.

PHOTOS: LUKAS KEAPPROTH

150

FOOD EQUITY

Setting the table

Loyola students and faculty are taking a multifaceted approach to ensure every community has equal access to healthy foods • BY EILEEN O'GORMAN

IT'S 5 P.M. ON A MONDAY, and Chelsea Denault isn't headed home to a nap and Netflix binge. Instead, she's going to wrangle tents and park food trucks. This week, someone accidentally parked in the gelato truck's spot, which would be trouble if Denault didn't use her booming voice while standing on a nearby table to locate the owner. It's now 5:05.

Denault is the manager of the Loyola Farmers Market, an initiative created by Institute of Environmental Studies (IES) students to increase access to fresh foods in the Rogers Park area during their June through October season. Prior to its creation in 2011, some of Chicago's northernmost residents struggled to access balanced options for prices they could afford. Now, they shop selections from over 10 local farmers and businesses, accompanied by live music beneath the hum of the Red Line. The market has changed the landscape of the North Side, and Loyola isn't stopping there. As an institution with roots that spread through Chicago and the surrounding communities, Loyola's efforts toward food equity are becoming just as expansive.

Food equity is a threefold issue, only achieved when communities have the same access to fresh, healthy food that appeals to them, is affordable, and is at a distance they can travel. In Chicago, the areas and people most food insecure are those with the lowest income. "Our market has two missions in terms of food equity that contribute to the area," says Denault. "The first is to provide access to healthy, local food to our community members. And the second is to create a safe and welcoming space regardless of whether they are customers or not."

The market partners with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides each certified customer a state-issued Link card. Link acts as a debit card, allowing SNAP recipients to make purchases and receive benefits through a regular transaction. At the Loyola Farmers Market, Link holders can receive up to $25 in benefits to spend on produce once they purchase up to $25 worth of market goods. This money can be used at any SNAP certified market in the state, but Denault has bigger plans to bring Loyola's market to the next level. "I would love to be able to triple-match," she says. "There are some markets in the area that are so well-funded and supported that they're able to provide another match on top of the match that Link provides. We could provide our customers with so much that way, not just produce but bread, plants, full meals."

About 20 miles west, other lofty goals are being achieved. Joanne Kouba, an associate professor in the Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health and director of the dietetics education program at Loyola's Health Sciences Campus in Maywood, has a unique project to help her students understand food equity.

Every year, students spread out into the Maywood area, armed with a grocery list from the USDA's food security toolkit. The list contains everything a family would need to properly feed themselves in a healthy and fulfilling way. The students are rarely able to find all the items on the list, even by piecing together gas station and convenience store purchases. Many were shocked to find that the last grocery store in town, an Aldi, closed down in 2016, which is

150

HEADING OFF HUNGER

Operating for more than 40 years, Loyola's Hunger Week brought students and faculty members together each November for activities that raised awareness of and funds for anti-hunger activism. The tradition started with a bang in 1973, when the Grateful Dead played an acoustic set in Loyola's Rambler Room. Each subsequent year carried a new theme and a corresponding commemorative button. Proceeds benefited organizations, chosen by students, who fought to end hunger locally or globally.

why Kouba helped develop partnerships with Provisio Health, local gardens, and the Loyola Family Medicine Clinic. "Right now about 30 to 40 families a week get a bag that has up to 10 pounds of fresh produce in it. And it's seasonal," says Kouba. "The food in these bags will help prevent and mitigate the diseases and conditions we see from people in this area, which is not aided by the lack of healthy food."

The fight to end food disparity doesn't just happen in IES or health sciences—on the business side, John Caltagirone has found a way for students to fight the good fight. Caltagirone, founding director of the Loyola Business Leadership Hub in the Quinlan School of Business, started the Urban Social Benefit Incubator in 2016. Students are recruited to give business advice to nonprofits or companies that benefit their communities. According to Caltagirone, the big idea behind a business is important, but learning how to stay afloat in an industry is crucial. "I see it all the time," he says. "People have this idea and they want to help others but they're not able to pull off the financials and the planning behind it. That's where we come in."

Students have gone on to drive the logistics behind many nonprofits, grocery stores, and unique initiatives, including a student-led project to build a free grocery store on Chicago's West Side using food donations and surplus. The Urban Social Benefit Incubator also assisted the Northern Illinois Food Bank in designing an online shopping and pick-up system that increased access and privacy for their clients.

The financial inequity that fuels food disparity isn't lost on Loyola's movers and shakers. Kelly Moore, associate professor of sociology, fights for increased access to food through her involvement in the FightFor15 movement, a group trying to raise Chicago's minimum wage to $15 per hour. Her approach to food equity addresses the systemic, long-term problems surrounding the issue. While nutrition counseling and community gardening are helpful solutions, Moore argues that this is still asking people to work for what she considers a human right. "You enable people's power of choice and their right to decide what they want to feed their families by giving them the money to do so," says Moore. "Food isn't just as simple as 'Oh, here have a can of soup that someone dug out of their cupboards.' It's culturally important."

PHOTO: LUKAS KEAPPROTH

150

PUBLIC SERVICE

Changing the landscape

Chicago's first chief equity officer is looking to level the playing field for city residents

BY ADAM DOSTER

EVERY DAY SINCE JULY, Candace Moore (BA/BS '09, JD '13) has reported to work on the fifth floor of Chicago's City Hall, around the corner from Mayor Lori Lightfoot, her new boss. If Moore gets turned around amidst the spiral staircases and marble columns, she only needs to locate the red door with Lightfoot's name printed squarely on the glass.

Lightfoot foregrounded Chicago's legacy of racial and economic inequality during her campaign. After her victory, she hired Moore to head up Chicago's Office of Equity and Racial Justice. The cabinet-level position—chief equity officer—is brand-new, designed to advance policies and practices through the lens of equity. Moore's actual desk is tucked into a corner, past a long line of cubicles. On that desk sits a pink coffee thermos that broadcasts her intentions: "Peace, Love & Inclusion."

Lightfoot and Moore knew each other only in passing before the former was elected this past May. In the aftermath of that win, campaign staffers reached out to Moore, wondering if she might help guide their education policy