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Profile: Meet 2020 Executive Director Michelle Cooley



Michelle Cooley is like any other undergraduate senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She's majoring in biology with a double minor in chemistry and Spanish for the professions. She works in the epidemiology department on campus and enjoys going to the gym and watching Netflix in her free time. But there's one thing that sets Cooley apart from the other 18,000 undergraduates at UNC... She serves as the executive director for an organization that raises nearly half a million dollars annually for the patients and families of UNC Children's hospital.

Carolina For The Kids is the largest student-run non-profit in the state, with an impressive \$6 million in funds raised to date since its founding in 1997. While Cooley wasn't even born the year it was founded, the moment she stepped onto campus she knew this organization was something she wanted to be a part of, but the high role of executive director was one she never saw herself in.

As an aspiring professional in the medical field, child healthcare is something Cooley has always been passionate about. When she found CFTK her freshman year, she fell in love with the cause. It was one that directly aligned with her interests and career goals. By junior year, she served on the executive board as the community relations chair. This role gave her the responsibility of fostering connections with local businesses and organizations to spread

awareness of CFTK's mission. When it was time to elect the 2020 executive director, she was encouraged to apply.

The role seemed like a little bit more than she could handle in her already busy schedule. She loved the cause and a part of her knew she would be a great fit for the position. Still, she was hesitant to take on such a time-consuming title her senior year. But after strong encouragement from the previous director, she was convinced. She stepped into the rigorous selection process, faced the board of directors, and was ultimately deemed as the most qualified candidate for the job.

Being the executive director of a multi-million-dollar fundraising organization is enough pressure alone. But unlike most executive directors, Cooley isn't paid, and this isn't her full-time job. On top of her responsibilities as the director, she must manage her full-time course schedule and part-time job. Needless to say, Cooley has gotten extremely good at time management.

Just because CFTK is run by students doesn't mean it's taken any less seriously. She constantly spends her afternoons in meetings with doctors, families, and other students involved in the organization. At night, she frequently finds herself sending emails, counting money, planning upcoming events, and checking up on the rest of the board. It goes without saying that her free time is few and far between, and her social life is often put on the back burner to get the rest of her work done.

"It's definitely not easy, and there are times that my to-do list is longer than there are hours in a day that makes me wish I could throw it all away and enjoy my senior year of college like a normal student," Cooley says. "But at the end of the day, the cause is what keeps me here. I really believe in the work we're doing and it's what drives me to keep going through all of the tough times."

As executive director, Cooley views one of her most important roles to be keeping the cause at the forefront of all organization functions. She knows how overwhelming it can be at times, for every level of involvement within the organization. Ultimately, everyone that joined the organization shares this same passion for giving back to the community and Cooley believes that should be what drives everyone to work harder and do better. Cooley's work would be impossible if it weren't for the people under her helping her every step of the way. There are 15 executive board members, 40 subchairs, and over 200 committee members that work tirelessly to ensure the success of the organization. Cooley recognizes that without them, Carolina For The Kids would never be as successful as it is today. That's why she places her priority on motivating them and acknowledging the value of their work.

For Cooley, Carolina For The Kids is her home. She has met not only her best friends, but her family through this organization, and that's what makes all the long hours worth it.