

NCACC Youth Summit 2015 Report
Interview with Wake County Vice Chair Caroline Sullivan
By Cheri Caggia

I interviewed Carolina Sullivan, the County Commissioner Vice Chair in Wake County. She was born native to North Carolina, in Charlotte and attended UNC Chapel Hill. She worked in Washington, DC for 9 years, working in insurance and helping with campaigns on Capitol Hill. She moved back to North Carolina with her husband, and continued working in public service, fundraising, and worked with the NC General Assembly. Her compassion for those struggling with mental illness and developmental disorders shows in the countless committees, teams, and boards she serves on to help others (such as Alliance Behavioral Healthcare, North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council for Children with Disabilities, Partnership to End Homelessness). She told me a friend of hers recommended she run for commissioner in her district, and following this advice, she was elected into office in 2012 for her first term. Mrs. Sullivan tells me that her connections throughout the state and county human services, as well as her kids in school, are what made her a perfect candidate to be elected to serve and focus on the issues that she believes matter the most. In her eyes, mental health issues and developmental disorders in children are easily ignored by those it does not affect, carries a stigma, and changing state/national policy creates chaos for many people.

The job of a County Commissioner is more complex than it seems. County government serves to bridge the gap between the state and the people, which is a hard task. Not only does this include schools, transit, and other ordinances, but also fire, water regulation, animal shelters, public health. Wake county is growing rapidly, not because birth rates are high (although Commissioner Sullivan told me that in our county births to death ration is 21:1), but because so many people are moving to this area, about 42 per day. This creates a stress on infrastructure, one of the County Commissioners biggest concerns. According to Commissioner Sullivan, every day is different as a Commissioner. 3 times a week they have formal meetings, two work sessions and one public meeting each Monday night. She told me one of the most important things is to follow your passions, and address issues you care about. Not everyone can be an expert at everything, so following your own interests and returning for collaboration is the most effective way to solve problems. She is very active in the community, and recommends the same for others. I was very glad to get the chance to talk to someone who helps create a positive change in my local government, and to get to know more about her job.