

LiveWell Interview, Anna Glenn

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Wendy Slusser, Anna Glenn

Dr. Wendy Slusser 00:02

Hey everybody. Welcome back to the Livewell podcast. I'm your host Dr. Wendy Slusser, Associate Vice Provost for the Seminole healthy campus initiative center. Happy Spring. I'm looking forward to the sunsets and the nesting birds this spring, and the fabulous guests we have lined up for you this season. One such fabulous guest is Anna Glen and Glen is a former UCLA gymnast who translated her athleticism and to advocacy. Today we talk about how she navigated her mental health struggles throughout the various transitions in her life. From moving to Los Angeles from North Carolina, dealing with career pausing injuries, and being adopted, graduating in the pandemic and discovering her identity. At UCLA, Anna develop the UCLA athletics Bruin brave campaign, which we will chat more about in this episode. It's a fantastic conversation, especially if you're interested in health transitions of any kind, athletic life and identity. Enjoy. Well, Anna, we're so excited to have you at the podcast today. You're a former UCLA gymnast with a psychology degree from UCLA. And now heading to USC, you are rival a your rival probably study occupational therapy, you've got quite a story to tell, and we would be so happy to hear about it today. Let's start with this transition that you're having going to a master's program. And you also had a recent transition, of course, graduating from college, and other transitions. So moving away from being an elite athlete and potentially taking care of athletes in occupational therapy. So I'd love you to share with us how you've navigated these transitions and how you know what kind of advice you would give to your peers about these big transitions, especially in the backdrop of COVID?

Anna Glenn 02:12

Yes, well, first of all, I'd like to say thank you so much for having me on the podcast, I'm super excited to be here. You know, I always say like, since I graduated high school, I've been going through so much transition since then, I mean, I moved across the country to go to UCLA from North Carolina, and I had a lot of injuries here and there starting when I came into college and such. And so dealing with that, and then finding new friends out in LA. And then once I graduated, I had a lot of transition as well. Transitioning from being an athlete, being a student, and then having to insert myself into the workforce when COVID hit. So there was a lot going on within those first couple years that I that was out of college, and even now now that I've

kind of found my footing and figured out where I want my life to go in a direction, you know, I'm still working on that, and going back to the student life, but without gymnastics. And so there's a lot to navigate here. And there's a lot that I'm trying to figure out myself, but I've been able to, you know, rely on our therapist, and my friends, my family. And so I think that has really helped me get through all the ups and downs that have been coming at me for the last, you know, five, six years. So it's been it's been great.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 03:34

Well, you've really responded in a very comprehensive way. And I'm thinking you just shared how much your friends made a difference. Your family and your therapist. Yes. Was that ever difficult to share with people that you had a therapist? Was there something in the world of gymnastics or elite athleticism that allows or disallows you to share that kind of vulnerability of meeting a therapist.

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Anna Glenn 04:03

The first time I actually really ventured to use a therapist was during my freshman year in college, and that was after I suffered my second season ending injury. I had had one during my senior year of high school. And I didn't really have anybody to help me navigate that. And that was the first time I had to sit out a whole entire season. I would say like in high school, there aren't a lot of resources that are available for student athletes and athletes because you're just kind of doing on your own coming to college. Luckily, there were a lot more resources I can lean on and, and utilize so I was lucky enough to have my coaches recommend me to a therapist. And so I think having them come to me and say hey, like I think it's really great. If you would go see a therapist. I know you've been struggling with this injury and I know you've been having a difficult time with the transition coming to college. I think this would be a great resource for you to use. Lose. I think after hearing my coaches suggest that it made me feel more comforted in the fact that I can actually reach out and use this resource. But I will say, generally speaking within the athletic community, it is a stigma, it is something that is hard for other athletes to admit that they're using a therapist. And that was something that I really worked to try to de stigmatize once I, you know, started the process of using therapy, and once I started healing and getting better with my injuries and recovery process, so that's something that I worked towards, for the last like three years of my college career and trying to bring light into the athletic community of what mental health is how we can better use the resources that are available and not, you know, shy away from using those resources. A lot of our student athletes were using the therapy resources that we had, you know, we would come from practice and be like, Hey, guys, I'm going to therapy. And so it was like really nice for us to be very open and have a very open discussion about it. I know that other sports were definitely not like that. But I was lucky enough to be in a community where we were. So I felt very supported in that.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 06:14

Sounds like you're a trendsetter. You mentioned that you tried to de stigmatize using therapy. And I think you started something it was called Bruin Brave. You want to share that a little bit with me?

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Anna Glenn 06:30

Yes. So I would say after my first year, that was my first time having a mental health problem and really dealing with like depression anxiety from not being able to compete, not integrating myself with the team as well, the transition into college, figuring out school, so there was a lot that I was putting on my plate during my first year. And so that was when I kind of went to my first depressive mode. Coming out of that the most, I think, transitional period I've ever had, it was really important for me to see the change of going from someone who was at like rock bottom, I would say that that was my rock bottom. And then coming out of that and winning a national championship and having like the highest point in my life. So seeing that transition. I was like, man, mental health is so important for your academic success for your athletic success and just for your overall well being. And I wanted to share that with other people within the athletic community. And so I developed a campaign called the UCLA athletics, Bruin, brave campaign. It really stemmed from my own personal experience. And then just seeing other student athletes also dealing with similar struggles that I was dealing with and kind of seeing the trends that was happening within the athletic community. I was like, you know, I think that really highlighting the importance of mental health here is really important. I know so many student athletes want to speak up about it, but feel silenced. The whole campaign itself kind of started as a PSA video, where we were able to get all UCLA athletic staff and student athletes together. And we created this amazing and powerful video where we all were kind of talking about mental health and really showing that like, we're here to stand with this topic and really try to make sure that other student athletes feel heard and seen. And that was like an amazing Kickstart to the campaign. And then eventually, during my senior year, we were able to roll out a volleyball game and a gymnastics competition, where we highlighted the room brave campaign and showed the PSA video on the Jumbotron and, you know, had like a whole themed competition that was so so cool to see that kind of fall into action and really see how we went from no one talking about it to it being highlighted and competitions with 1000s of people in the stands. So it was it was really exciting to see that kind of transcend into something beautiful.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 08:56

The word brave rings true to what you just described for your journey. And that real sort of roller coaster of your freshman year being at your lowest but then winning a national championship. What would you like to share with your peers who I know many are suffering even more now, post COVID? What kinds of words of encouragement or advice would you give your peers?

A

Anna Glenn 09:23

I remember when I was in my lowest, it felt like it was a never ending cycle of me just in this dark pit and not being able to crawl out of it. So that feeling is is really tough to overcome. And when it's continuous and you don't see the light at the end of the tunnel. It's really hard to kind of gain perspective about everything. I would say that if you are feeling like you're in that dark hole, just know that things will don't have to stay this way forever. We don't know how long it might take for you to get out of that pit but it won't last forever. When I was in that pit, it was very hard to see that. But there were times when I was like trying to remind myself like, hey, like, this is not going to happen, this is not going to be my life forever. So reminding

myself that did help a little bit, and then just, you know, use using other people to lean on to help me get through those tough times, and really, you know, listen to me, and just be able to just pour everything out to them and really show my vulnerability, I think was actually very helpful for me to move past all of that just being okay with being vulnerable to other people I think is really important, because it shows that yeah, you are human, and that everybody has a different path. But everyone goes through similar experiences, everyone can empathize with similar things.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 10:49

That's really valuable insight for everybody, not only your age group. And I think that another piece to, you know, the vulnerability part is, it's magnified through many people feeling grief about something they might have lost during COVID, as well lost their chance to graduate in person, or they might have lost a loved one from COVID, how have you recaptured some of the things that you might have lost?

A

Anna Glenn 11:21

During that, it was just crazy when COVID hit because we were on the cusp of our senior competition. And it was two days before our senior competition when our athletic department chair came to us during practice and was like, Hey, we're going to stop practice. I don't think this competition is going to happen. Just be aware that, you know, things are starting to shut down. And as unfortunate as it is, we're going to have to do the same at this point in time. And that was two days before our senior competition before we started postseason. And it was a big loss. I think the fact that we were all going through it together, made it a little bit more comforting, and the fact that we all knew how we each other felt, you know, so that was, that was a very interesting experience. But I think, you know, looking forward now and seeing how that kind of happened. Yes, it was sad. But I think that I can move past that looking at all the amazing things that can happen in the future. There's always things to gain. So I think having that mindset kind of really helps me get through, you know, the, the concept of loss, and you really coping with that, that idea of trying to regain perspective that everyone lost something, and that we all have much to gain at this point. So I think that mindset really helped me get through all that.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 12:43

What I'm hearing is your incredible resilience. And do you feel that you built skills on resilience through your incredible focus in gymnastics? Or where do you think your resilience comes from?

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Anna Glenn 12:58

Well, I think that my resilience kind of started at early age. I mean, I had a very interesting past, I was adopted when I was 15 months old. I, before that point, I was abandoned as a baby in China. And my twin sister and I were found on the steps of a hospital, we were taken in by an orphanage, then we moved to a foster mom, and then we were adopted into our current family.

And so I think, you know, with that crazy pass, that develops resilience at a very early age, but then again, going through gymnastics and having to sacrifice so much at a young age and, you know, having to travel every weekend, and not being able to hang out with friends in high school, and even like younger than that, all of that kind of led up to me being able to build this resilience in college while I was going through all this transition, and having all these injuries and going through a lot of really tough situations. And so I think that my resilience has kind of built up over the years. But I think that you know, during the COVID year and, you know, all the other racial issues that were happening during the same time going through all that really shows that humans are so capable of resilience and so capable of adaptation whenever they're thrown different things in life. So it's really, really incredible.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 14:22

What you're highlighting is that resilience, you might go into a challenge with your current resilience, but you can build more resilience when you meet adversity. You know, I'm curious, getting back to your campaign, the Bruin brave program, what were some of your observations around why other athletic teams outside of gymnastics were less inclined to be accepting of, you know, going to seek help for your emotional well being?

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Anna Glenn 14:55

That observation kind of came from what I was seeing in the training room, just kind of hearing the buzz within that Athletic Training Center, you know, our athletes like from the gymnastics team, we're very open about talking about mental health and seeking help and saying like, hey, I need a day of rest, you know, but the lack of, I guess, ability to have that conversation from other student athletes is something that I noticed and not a lot of athletes. Yes, they were complaining that they were tired. They're complaining that they had a lot of studying to do, but they were like, I just need a rest. But they weren't able to give themselves that rest or weren't really able to accept the fact that they needed the rest. Being able to be open about that something I wasn't really hearing enough of. And everyone in the student athlete community needs a break at some point, whether you have that ability to take that rest or not. It's it's real and burnout is real. I think that a lot of people weren't able to accept the fact that there an even lack of understanding and awareness that there are these resources was something that I noticed as well, because our coaches were very open about telling us that CAPS, the counseling service on campus, was readily available and just around the corner from where we trained. But a lot of student athletes had no idea where it was. And so lack of awareness and education about it was something that we also need to bring to light because I think a lot of student athletes would have wanted to seek the help if they knew it was there. All of those things in combination made me want to bring that campaign to life.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 16:31

Very observant of you. Thank you. I have nice twins who are division one and runners. And they went to college together and everything. And I think it's quite common their twin, a lot of twins. I mean, not a lot, but I think at least I noticed them running. There were a lot of twins. You talked a lot about you know, family and importance of the family. What do you think, what how has that played into your life story?

A

Anna Glenn 16:58

Having a twin has been like the greatest thing ever for me. And I mean, we went through so much together. And I was just so thankful that we were able to stay together when we were adopted and going through life with her has been the greatest gift ever. And I think even going through gymnastics, it's so special because having someone by my side during the entire process was really, really crucial for my ability to succeed in the sport. I know that my sister like she knows me better than anybody else other than myself. So when I was going through those tough times, like she really recognize that and she brought those up to my coach, which is the reason why I was referred to go to counseling center in the first place. So having her be able to recognize my struggles. And without me recognizing those struggles was really crucial to my healing process. And to my ability to kind of get to this point that I met today. We even have the same injury in our freshman year, which is like the most bizarre thing ever, we had the same exact injury, we entered the same shoulder, doing the same exact skill, it could not be more twin telepathy, and having someone go through that same exact experience is unbelievable. And so I was just so grateful that we were going through those struggles together. Because, gosh, I don't know if I would have been able to do it alone.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 18:17

That's such a heartwarming thing to think about how close you two are. Are you identical or fraternal?

A

Anna Glenn 18:24

Identical.

D

Dr. Wendy Slusser 18:25

This leads me to the question of identity. And I imagine, you know, you've had the identity as a lifelong gymnasts, and also as a twin. Can you share with us how you've explored your identity outside of gymnastics and twinship?

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Anna Glenn 18:42

When I was little, I mean, my whole identity kind of surrounded gymnastics. And it I didn't really expand outside of that. And it just because I think I was just still trying to find myself. And once I came to college, that's when I really kind of dug into the whole concept of identity and finding who I was outside of athletics outside of being a twin and outside of all these other things, and really just finding the root of who anagon is, and I think it was around my sophomore year, I was able to join an organization on campus called ACA, which is the Association of Chinese Americans and being able to be surrounded by people that are like me, and have like a similar background look like me have similar interests was really, really nice to be around and so comforting. And that's where I found my core group in that organization. And that's when I really started to lean into my identity as an Asian American. I never really associated myself as

like Chinese American before that, but really being a part of this group. I really dug into that and now I'm like, so proud to be the person that I am and seeing that and the transition outside of you know, just being a gymnast and stuff like that. I'm able to find myself within a different identity and being this Asian American woman who is working to establish herself in society and stuff like that. And really being able to identify to, you know, other influencers or other celebrities or other people out there that are the same as I am, it's really nice to be able to really latch on to that identity. And so, you know, transitioning into what I'm doing for work. Now, my identity as a student of occupational therapist is something that I'm starting to look into now. And so excited to be a part of and to join a new community of individuals that are like minded and have a strong passion for helping others is something that now I associate myself with, and it's just so nice to be able to find myself and, you know, find other things that I can latch on to myself other than just like those big, you know, titles that I had before.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 20:59

But you've really taken advantage of what's available, it sounds like at UCLA, you know, beyond your experiences on the gymnastics team, but you know, the mental health services, and the amazing number of clubs there are that you can join or groups is such a diverse population to start with. What other things have you reflected on in your time at UCLA that stand out to you?

A

Anna Glenn 21:27

Oh, gosh, I feel like there's so much and it's so hard to pinpoint it, I was so grateful to be under the coaching of Miss Val, because she really valued a person, not just the athlete, and really developing someone that is beyond gymnastics, and really developing an entire person that can go out into the world and be their best version of themselves. And so I was very grateful for all the lessons that Miss Val taught me and all my other coaches that were, you know, that I had, as well. And just being able to, you know, be surrounded by someone that wants me to thrive in the world is something that I was so grateful to have.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 22:12

Shee has a very kind of well known piece of advice set extremely high goals attainable only through unwavering discipline, you will have a far greater chance for success. And if you set medium goals, that was one of your favorite quotes of her. So tell me why is that one of your favorite quotes?

A

Anna Glenn 22:31

Well, I think that quote really hit me hard, because I heard that the first time I heard that was when I was going through my low and my freshman year, for the longest time, I was like, I don't really know how I'm going to be able to get out of this, all these things that I felt were somewhat unattainable at the time. But being able to set those expectations for myself, and having a level of standard for myself, really, I think propelled me into success. And so that quote really meant a lot to me. Because now I can take that outside of gymnastics and outside of school and say like, Hey, I have these really great goals of mine. Why not set them high?

Why not shoot for it? You know, and like, Why shoot for less than what I feel like I'm valued at. So really giving myself a standard to work towards is something that I continue to take with myself, because now you know, I'm entering this doctorate degree program, and I'm like, oh, shoot, that seems like a lot of work. I don't know if I'm gonna be able to get there. But I'm like, of course, I'm gonna be able to get there. I got into the program, I'm already one step closer. So, you know, setting that expectation for myself that like, Yes, I'm going to graduate this program in three years. And yes, I am going to become an occupational therapist. You know, it's like, I can still bring that same concept into my current life.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 23:45

It's a really great way to develop self efficacy. So what is what is your big goal, after OT?

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Anna Glenn 23:52

I had the opportunity of volunteering at Cedars Sinai, and going into the neuro clinic and seeing the amazing things that they do there. And the the technology that they use an OT is absolutely astounding. And just seeing that was like so inspiring to me, I was like, Man to one day be able to create a device or to develop some type of technique that can be used within the field of occupational therapy all over the world, if I have the ability and the resources to create something that can be used worldwide, and help others get to a level of functionality that they thought they would never be able to reach is something that I would love to do. You know, it's just setting those like, you know, high expectations for myself. So if I can set those high expectations of winning a national championship, or of graduating with like a 3.5 GPA, like I can definitely, you know, do the same in this sentence.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 24:49

Well, I think you've got the ingredients to get there. If I was a gambling person or a betting person, I would put money on it. Totally. Well, so we always like to end our podcasts with a question, what does it mean for you to live well?

A

Anna Glenn 25:09

I love that question. And, you know, I think I'm, I've been taking the last couple of years to really figure out what living well means to me. But I think, to live well means to be able to have all the resources that you need to be as successful as possible and to surround yourself with a community that will help you do that. And I've been so lucky to have those opportunities, and to have that community to get me to the point where I am today. So continuing to really make sure that I invest in myself invest into others. And to really feel that passion that I have, I think is the best way to live, you know, finding ways to engage with others, and to not only help yourself, but help others is something that I'm so passionate about. And I think that's the best way to live and live well.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:03



Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:15

That's such a great last comment, given what you've just described during this entire interview. And you certainly preach what you practice. So keep it up, Anna.



Anna Glenn 26:17

Yes, such a pleasure. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.



Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:20

Thank you. Talking to the younger generation currently entering the workforce like Anna really leaves me hopeful. I know this world is in good hands. They seem to have a sense of resiliency and dedication to paving new paths. It's inspiring to witness. Thank you to Anna for being a guest. Today, I'll be ruminating on how we can embrace our life transitions as a way to understand our goals and our identities more deeply. Thanks for tuning in everyone. If you've been inspired by this episode, have ideas for new guests. Or want me Wendy to be a guest on your podcast. Visit our podcast page on our website, healthy.ucla.edu to contact us. And of course subscribe if you haven't already. We'll talk to you soon. This episode has been brought to you by the central healthy campus initiative Center at UCLA. Take care