

Sara Guillen

## USA Swimming Western Zone Diversity and Inclusion Camp

In early summer 2018, I had a wonderful opportunity to travel to San Diego, California to attend USA Swimming's Diversity and Inclusion Camp in the western area. We left on a Thursday morning from Billings, Montana, to arrive in California midday. There, we arrived at campus and were introduced to some staff and a few other campers who had arrived. Once most everyone had arrived, we went over a schedule and some expectations for the weekend. Then, we went up to our rooms to unpack and meet our roommates. Over the course of the weekend, we had multiple dryland/swim sessions, and many meetings or talks that were very beneficial. These meetings consisted of talking about the psychology of the sport, how to make goals, and how to reach those goals. It was an amazing experience that focused a lot on things we could apply to areas outside of swimming and not just in the pool.

To begin, this camp was a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and learn lessons about swimming and how they can be applied to other aspects of life. Throughout this camp, I made many friendships with people from all over. It really was a unique experience to meet people from other states. I know that these friendships will continue. It was good to meet people from the western area that I can look for at a big meet, rather than not know anyone but people from Montana. I am very grateful I got to experience this because it has given me a lot to think about both in and out of the pool.

Throughout the whole camp, we discussed a lot of important healthy habits. A nutritionist talked about how to balance healthy, beneficial foods, while also being an athlete. We also discussed sleep, hydration, and healthy relationships. These are all important because they affect our everyday lives and, if not taken care of, they can be damaging to personal goals.

Another important lesson we learned was the importance of team. They strongly emphasized this throughout all the days, by using cheers at the end of practice, or doing small team bonding activities randomly. Something I really enjoyed was how easy it was to find your spot and be comfortable at the camp. We had a meeting one night that emphasized on how important it is to think about your teammates. For example, a bad day is inevitable, especially during teenage years. However, when practice time comes around, spreading negativity can be affecting the goals of other teammates and their success. We discussed how to be a good teammate especially when things get difficult.

The aspect of camp that has stuck with me the most would be the lessons they taught us about the sport. However, these lessons could all be applied outside of the sport as well. In particular, Juan, one of the counselors, talked a lot about how to reach your goal, whether it would be in swimming or in another area. He covered the different types of goals, and how we can use skills like body language and active listening to reach them. Additionally, he taught us a lot about the different levels of swimming, and how every person's path to success is different, whether it's what camps you go to, or what degree you get in college.

More specifically, we talked about grit. In the sport or just in life, grit is essential in order to succeed. Giles Smith, a very inspirational athlete, came to talk at the camp on one of the last days. He has experienced the worst and the best parts of swimming. He's gone through major accomplishments, as well as major injuries. But, he is still learning and growing, and inspired us to do the same. He did not start swimming with any profound talent, but instead worked hard. His story was truly inspirational because he explained that he had been beaten down, torn apart, and crushed by the sport of swimming. Yet, he continued on because he believed in himself and chased a dream. He taught us how important and beneficial mind control is, and how to pick yourself up after falling down, even for the millionth time. This was the most beneficial talk we had, at least in my opinion, because it applies to everything we do. I now have deeper insight as to how to set goals, how to find balance in all aspects of life in order to reach

those goals, and how important passion and positivity is, and how much it can affect performance.

Overall, this was an amazing opportunity that I am extremely grateful for. I would recommend this camp to everyone because of not only how beneficial it is, but also because of how exciting and fun it is. This camp really inspired me to make some changes in attitude and lifestyle choices. I'm sure that in the long run, I will see positive results in my swimming performance and overall personality due to these changes. It was very well organized, and engaging for everyone who was in attendance.

Thanks USA Swimming!!!