Jen Walsh:

From the American School Counselor Association. This is, I Hear You Say. A podcast for school counselors and other leaders in education. I'm Jen Walsh, director of education and training here at ASCA. ASCAs annual conference taking place in Austin, Texas, July 9th through 12th, 2022, will feature a dynamic lineup of keynote speakers. One of which is SaulPaul who joins us today.

SaulPaul is a Grammy nominated musician with a message. He has presented three TEDx Talks, performed at the Kennedy Center for performing arts and been featured on America's Got Talent. His life story of transitioning from tragedy to triumph, has been told on screen via the documentary, tower to tower, as well as via his memoir, "Be the change." SaulPaul currently serves as the Make it Movement's first official ambassador and Global Changemaker. His responsibilities include empowering 1 million young people with the tools, skills, and inspiration to find their path to economic freedom and post secondary success. Whether via art, entrepreneurship or community service, SaulPaul is committed to #BeTheChange. Welcome SaulPaul, we are thrilled for you to be joining us today and that you'll be with us in Austin, Texas, this summer. I hear you say that you are a musician with a message, what is your message?

SaulPaul:

That is a simple but profound question. If I had to boil it down to one answer, it would be that we're all born on purpose with the purpose, and that we can walk in that purpose, but really it's more broad than that. I have the unique opportunity to entertain, inspire and empower unique and diverse audiences and one of my strengths and skill sets is being able to custom my messaging for the audience. And that's what gives me life, basically being able to pour into others and give life to others gives me life so I'm consistently crafting and contextualizing my messaging for the moment for the audience so they can be most impactful. And I think that comes from my background as a songwriter, I don't write the same song every time I write a song, I write unique songs and it is the same when it comes to my message.

Jen Walsh:

You'll be joining us for the 2022 ASCA annual conference in Austin, Texas. Yes, we are so excited and our audience they're school counselors so talking about customizing your message to specific groups, what would your message be to school counselors?

SaulPaul:

Well, I think part of the allure of what I do and the mystique and the intrigue is, I don't want to give it away. It'll be special and it'll be for that moment, but I have over a decade's worth experience, really closer to two, serving young people and working alongside counselors and my heart beats and just appreciates counselors so I'm excited to be able to be in the same room with so many counselors to have done so much work and impacted so many lives and I can say that my goal will be to encourage, and my mission is always to entertain, inspire, and empower. It'll be entertaining, inspiring, and empowering. And I look forward to just celebrating these amazing people that are changing lives daily and have done it for years and decades. I know.

Jen Walsh:

I hear you say that basically you have to come to the conference?

SaulPaul:

Basically. That's it summed up. I'm a musician with the message and even going back to the previous question, part of that is what does that mean? It's not even this much about the message with maybe the presentation, like myself, I'm an artist, I'm proud to say Grammy nominated musician, two time, Grammy nominated artist and whatnot, but I'm a keynote speaker and so whenever I present, the presentations are very unique. It's not a traditional keynote and it's not a traditional concert. It's this unique thing that really exists in that moment. That's why it's hard to say in advance because those that are present, get to play a part in what actually transpires and happens. It'll be special.

Jen Walsh:

I hear you. It's more of the experience, which is appropriate because you'll be one of our experienced Ed speakers so we are extremely excited and we look forward to this experience for sure. Your latest album is titled Okay to Be Different. What does that title mean to you? I imagine there must be a backstory to that name.

SaulPaul:

There is. It's interesting, there's no song on the album titled Okay to Be Different. The collection of songs is just titled Okay to Be Different. But I think it was because I had arrived at a point in life where I really realized that was absolutely true. I found so much success. I have this unique story of how I transitioned from tragedy to triumph. However, came so many obstacles so it doesn't really matter. Like if you say two-time Grammy nominated or three Ted Talks, was on America's Got Talent or five Super Bowls or impacted so many young lives and whatnot, that sounds good but I don't even think that's worth anything unless you contrasted to the fact that I grew up in foster care that I had no support growing up, I grew up in a very impoverished place and that I had a lot of potential and made a lot of bad choices and had to deal with the consequences of that.

I hit rock bottom before I was able to ascend and make it to the mountaintop. Now that I've found success on my terms and what others also defining success, I realized that the power came from me appreciating the fact that it's okay to be different. And that's where it really came from because again, my heart is to just entertain, inspire and empower to help others live their best life, to be the change, to give what I didn't have when I was young or even as a young adult, as a professional, but I didn't get bitter about it, I became better. And because of that, I chose to be the change and give back and again, now that I'm on that other side of success, I realized that it really came because I was able to own my uniqueness.

I was able to own the, "I'm different." I don't do it the way that others do it and that's okay, I don't perceive it the way others perceive it, I don't articulate it the way others articulate it, and I also know that in the beginning that wasn't celebrated. I was ostracized, I was made to feel less than... It was awkward, it was lonely, it wasn't okay. I had to persevere through that and so that's why on my album, Okay to Be Different, which really felt like this mountaintop moment, because I based all my albums independently, but I actually signed a record deal. A record label approached me and I released that album in partnership with a record label and the album went on to do great things and whatnot, and I realized it was because I accepted that it was okay to be different.

Jen Walsh:

Yeah. And I think that's something that our school counselors are trying to instill in their students every day that it's okay to be different and-

SaulPaul:

Oh no, I would also love to add that it's great for the students, but it's great for the counselors. Throughout my ten-year working with schools, I've always seen the amazing counselors, the counselors who were amazing, but they were trendsetters, they were innovators, they were pioneers, they thought different, they saw a problem, they were visionaries in all essence. And because of that, they could also relate to what I shared earlier. That wasn't necessarily celebrated, it was like, "Yeah, that's a little bit too left of center." That's a little too far out and whatnot. And so again, that part gets lonely. I just also want to encourage my professional peers because it's not just for the kids, but it's for the adults as well that it's okay to be different.

Jen Walsh:

Such a great point. The theme of this year's experienced Ed general session where you'll be speaking is, change agents in education so your first album, when titled Be The Change, how can one be the change?

SaulPaul:

Well, that's alley oop right there. I can slam dunk that one. My take on Be The Change is this, the fact is we all live on the same planet, the truth is we each live in our own world and I encourage people to be the change in world they live in. And it's really that simple and it's a creative and unique way to say personal responsibility. And that a person is self empowered to, "Oh, I can be the change in my world." That world might be their classroom, that world might be their school, that world might be their grade level, that world might be their neighborhood, their community, their city, they might think a little bigger, their state, their country and they might think globally, like I do, it could be the world, but we each live in our own world.

What happens in my world doesn't necessarily impact someone else's world in reality. Somebody could not care what's happening overseas and on another continent in a different country right now where there may be a war going on if they choose not to care, then that doesn't really impact them. If they choose to care, then they could do something about it so we're all empowered and that's how a person can be the change, and I just want people to be the change in the world they live in.

Jen Walsh:

I think that also goes back to the last question, Okay to Be Different, I know change is often doing things differently. Right? They're really interconnected, I would say.

SaulPaul:

I agree. That's very true and very perceptive. They go together. That's why I'm so excited about participating in this year's event because being able to speak to change agents and once people really realize also what I often say when I'm talking about what does that mean when I explain how to be the change and the way I explain, it also removes the responsibility of worrying about what somebody else isn't doing, because that can become burdensome, stressful. Oh my gosh. If they did this and if they did that and it very well may be true, but we're not empowered over that. Again, that could become stressful, even toxic.

And instead it's like, we all are empowered to be change agents. That's quite exciting, that was my approach. And even when I released my album Be The Change, it was very unique because I made that album for young people, little listeners, students, and it was really an album based on SEL, Social Emotional Learning. As I took social and emotional learning competencies like leadership, communication skills and a growth mindset approach. And then I reimagine these things or engineered these things and put them inside of songs and music, because they're very important, they're relevant, and that's also how we can be the change and live healthy at the same time.

Jen Walsh:

Absolutely. And I am super excited to hear some of that at the conference hopefully. I hear that you are nominated for Grammy this year.

SaulPaul:

Woo-hoo.

Jen Walsh:

I know that is so exciting.

SaulPaul:

Yes. Imagine being a counselor and all you really care about are young people and edifying their lives and in the process of doing the one thing you care about, you get celebrated and elevated and how and awarded, which is like gravy on top because really all you care about is impacting young people's lives. That's me because that's what I care about. I've received numerous awards over my career, but when it comes to music, that is the peak. It's the only award, it's prestigious, it's the only award that is voted upon by our peers in the music industry. And because that was a different thing too. I don't make music just for the sake of entertainment, I make music to edify, again, to entertain, inspire and empower and so that made me different. It wasn't always appreciated in the beginning, it was, "Oh yeah, like you're doing it for the kids." Or "Oh you do it for the family or community."

And it was like, no, those people were people too and I just make music and this is this unique gift and talent that I have and whatever I've done, I've always wanted to do that the highest level. Being acknowledged and recognized by the recording academy as being elite at what it is that I do and appreciated by my peers. That's amazing. And then that's one part. The other part is, it's the Grammys, come on red carpets, [crosstalk 00:14:31]-

Jen Walsh:

Yeah.

SaulPaul:

Tuxedos, fancy stuff. I mean, it's the Grammys. I grew up watching this on TV, golden trophies and yeah. That's amazing I'm just excited. Excited about the nomination, excited about the journey and excited about the experience like actually being there and this year is actually unique, they've always hosted the Grammys in LA. Twice they've hosted it in New York, but for the first time ever, they're hosting it in Las Vegas, which as even a whole new level of fanfare in history so yeah, I'm quite excited.

Jen Walsh:

Yeah. Wow. That is so amazing.

SaulPaul:

I mentioned that it's going to be an amazing experience for me just as an artist to attend the Grammys and enjoy that experience. What I've discovered over time as a only child, think its part of my personality, it's part of what was instilled in me by the amazing woman who adopted me and raised me, my grandmother Perley Collins. She raised me as the only child so it was only me and her growing up. And I'm used to creating community. I didn't have brothers and sisters, it wasn't natural for me so I've always created community and I realized life's better when you share. And now that I've been presented this unique opportunity because of the music that I've created and whatnot, and I get to enjoy this experience, I'm like, "How could it even be better?" And I think about the fact that over the last decade, I've had the opportunity to impact a million plus students through live events, not even via online and music and streams and all that good stuff.

Just through like live concerts, keynotes and presentations. And it's via schools K-12. And as I've had the opportunity to do that all across the country in different cities, different states, different counties at these various schools, it wasn't alone, it was generally through an educator, it was through a counselor, it was through a teacher or a principal and then many times counselors. And I didn't get here alone so to me it doesn't make sense to go to the Grammys alone. I'm excited that I get to invite a special guest to come with me. And so we've created, I have a team, I'm a solo artist but I'm no solo act. I even have a team in my company, everything is SaulPaul. The companies called SaulPaul Productions. I have a foundation it's called the SaulPaul Foundation. I just happen to be the face and the voice of most of it but there's a team behind me.

My team and I came up with this opportunity where basically others get to celebrate a counselor. I'm like, Hey, I'm going to be hanging out with thousands of counselors come this summer, how cool would it be if I got to take one of those counselors to Vegas with me? And provide an all expense paid trip, fly them out. And they get to experience this journey with me? Because I recognize that they are awesome and amazing. I've always said, I've been saying since I've been doing this, I believe counselors, teachers, educators, and moms are the most underappreciated people on the planet. I believe they do the most, they don't do it for the credit so I guess that's why it gets this slot, but I love to celebrate them whenever I get a chance to, and this is just one more chance to celebrate and since I'm coming to the conference in July, I'm like, "Hey, how cool would it be to partner with the American School Counselor Association?" And like, Hey, let's create an opportunity where we can highlight and celebrate one of the many amazing counselors that are part of the association.

Jen Walsh:

Oh my gosh, that is amazing. I know our school counselors will love that and whoever the person is that gets to go, they are so lucky and I know we'll have such a great time. Again, thank you so much for this opportunity, it is super exciting. We will be posting more information about this application in the show notes of the episode today so if you're interested, please check there and review the details to perhaps accompany SaulPaul to the Grammys this year so that's amazing in Las Vegas, which is actually where our ASCA annual conference was last year.

SaulPaul:

Oh, was It?

Jen Walsh:

Mmh.

SaulPaul:

Ah.

Jen Walsh:

Yes.

SaulPaul:

They might have to show me around, there'll be more experienced with the lay of the land than me.

Jen Walsh:

Exactly. We are really looking forward to seeing that happen so thank you for that and for acknowledging and recognizing the impact that school counselors have.

SaulPaul:

Oh, by far, like I say, yeah. I'm so excited and honored by this to be able to appreciate. And it's interesting. I know counselors so well. If we figured out like how can we create this opportunity and celebrate? Well, there's two different ways. One, a counselor can self nominate, that is actually encouraged, I hope everyone would do that but my experience with counselors make me believe people wouldn't even apply because they'd be like, "Oh no, not me." That feels awkward. That's about the students and the family and the school and the community so they can either self nominate, which I encourage and I hope that they would, or someone else can nominate them.

And I'd imagine we have a lot of that so I mean, Jen, you could be like, "Oh, okay. I know someone." And then you could just nominate that counselor. If they go to the website, saulpaul.com/vip they can find details. Imagine that there's going to be a counselor. I'm not going to allow it, I want to celebrate a counselor, but I can see someone being like, I know a kid and he really likes music, she really likes music. Maybe they can go, I see it so much or they're so selfish.

Jen Walsh:

Yes.

SaulPaul:

Which they're so amazing and that's why they're so awesome and that's why we're doing this so we're going to out of our way to be a blessing and I also have to shout out our partner which is the Make it Movement, which is an amazing program where I'm the global ambassador and we're talking about post-secondary success and career pathways for students. They've come alongside and made this a experience for whoever we get to choose and highlight and bring out.

Jen Walsh:

Well, thank you to them too. We are just thrilled to be a part of this really exciting opportunity so thank you. We talked a little bit about this, but over the last decade, you have impacted more than 1 million youth. What does that work look like? And what impact has it had on your life?

SaulPaul:

That's a great question. I didn't think about things like this unless I was asked in an interview and I've had to honored to do lots of interviews over the span of my career. And what I realized is that ultimately I'm mirroring what I saw growing up, which is, even though my mom died, my dad left, I was in foster care, I mentioned this woman that swooped in like wonder woman and adopted me, my grandmother. And she raised me, she did the best she could, but she was old and I was young, she was slow, I was fast, she was soft heartened, I was hardheaded, so she had her hands full and she raised me with not much, ultimately raised me in poverty, but it didn't feel like it growing up, it didn't feel like it because knew I was loved.

That was one. Two, it didn't feel like it because even though we didn't have much, we were still the center of love in our neighborhood and all these people would come to our house. Kind of be frustrating to me as a kid. People would always be coming over and she'd stop everything and then she'd make plates of food and give it to them and whatnot. She was always contributing to others. And now as an adult and as a professional and with the work that I do, I realize like, "Oh, wow. I think I'm just mirroring what I saw growing up." Where I realize that if you have something, you have enough to share. And to be able to have impacted over a million young people, one, I love it because it's just also my personality.

I like whatever I do, I like to do it big. Even when I got in trouble, I got into big trouble and now I've taken that energy and that's why counselors are so amazing. There were some counselors that helped me redirect that energy and that focus and now I've taken that same intentionality and I just pointed at like, okay, what's the highest level that I could do, whatever it is that I'm doing. And so for me, it's like, I care less about like my Spotify streams and I care more about how I modify dreams of young people and help them to dream in 3D and Be The Change and know they can make it. It feels like I'm walking in my purpose, when I do that. It gives me life and I look forward to doing it for decades more. And that's why I share my story. That's why I share tools and tips, techniques, and resources. I'm telling you. hopefully it carries over. I truly appreciate what counselors do.

Jen Walsh:

What inspires or motivates you?

SaulPaul:

Purpose. Yeah, I believe we're all born to do something, not a one thing, but something. And I believe we get life when we do that thing, life being that vigor, that energy. There's empirical data. I think if you look in life and you can see people, there's a guy that just retired from playing football, he played 23 years, he retired and apparently that only lasted 40 days. And just the other day, he un-retired. He's like, Nope, this is what I'm on to do. I love it. There was a meme, it is a good example that applies. There was a meme, it was on my Instagram and the guy I'm talking about, counselors like football too so they'll get distracted and start worrying about football. I mention who it is, but it's not a football example, it's just a person example.

And this athlete, he's such an anomaly. He played in 10 Super Bowls. That's unheard of. And he won seven of them. That's unheard of a athlete would be happy if they played in the Super Bowl, let alone one more, this guy win seven and it is like, what more is there for him to do? And I love it because he retires then he un-retires and he comes back and so the meme, the funny guy was like, he was going on a rant and he was like, what unfinished business could you have, you played in 10 super bowls, you won seven, what else is there to do? But when it's purpose. It's like I met so many people that have retired in education, they always tell me there's one Harold Howie, he's a counselor.

Every year this gentleman would tell me like, SaulPaul this is my last year. This is my last year. He told me that for like eight years and then when he [inaudible 00:26:12] it was never his last year because he wouldn't quit because he loved what he was doing, it was purpose. And then when he finally retired, I went and I ended up going some other school and I saw I'm on that campus and he was like, "Well they needed some help," but I love it because it was like purpose. What inspires me is purpose for someone elsem that's being a mother for someone else, that's running a business, it's being a coach, it's being a songwriter. And it's interesting. You have to be brave enough to be different. Not only is it okay to be different, sometimes you have to be brave enough to be different because the way that the world is set up, they will put expiration dates on thing.

They put expiration dates on things, even people. And they're like, "Oh you're too old, you can't do this anymore." Or "Your time's up." And I don't believe that's really how it works. fish is a fish. It doesn't really have an expiration date. And a person is a person, if you have a purpose, share the purpose. That's what inspires me to walk in my purpose, to live in my purpose and then continually quote, "Creative to be impactful and effective." Not just do it for the sake of doing it, but to do it at a high level. And so just like I got to Grammy this year, I've been doing it. I like to say over 10 years, because that'll always be true. Like over a decade with the truth is it's closer to two decades. Yeah. And I'm my last year was my greatest year because not only do I want to do it, but I want to do it well and I love making that impact. Inspiring others, inspires me. That's my purpose. And that's how I'm inspired.

Jen Walsh:

Well thank you so much. SaulPaul, for joining us today, it been a true pleasure speaking with you and we are so excited to have you in Austin. And I think that it's only appropriate to close this episode with one of your songs so let's take a listen to, I am enough from SaulPaul's album, Be the Change.

SaulPaul:

(singing).

Jen Walsh:

Thank you all for listening. We hope to have you back on our next episode, but until then be sure to check out our website, schoolcounselor.org for school counselor resources. We'd also love to engage with you on all of our social media platforms. Find us on Facebook at the American School Counselor Association, Twitter at ASCA tweets and Instagram at we are ASCA and hear from you soon. I'm Jen Walsh. And this has been, I Hear You Say the podcast from the American School Counselor Association.