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 & Training here at ASCA. Today is a really exciting day at ASCA, as we are welcoming our new board chair, Richard Tench. Richard Tench is currently a school counselor at St. Albans High School in St. Albans, West Virginia, where he has served his students, families, and community for 12 years. In 2017, St. Albans High School became the first school in the state to earn the ASCA ramp designation. In addition to his counseling duties, Richard is the senior class sponsor and sponsors the St Alban's High School GSA and academic quiz bowl teams.

Richard also serves as an adjunct faculty member at Marshall University, where he teaches practicum and internship courses. In addition, Richard is a nationally certified counselor, a national certified school counselor, licensed professional counselor in West Virginia, and an approved licensed professional supervisor. Richard was elected to the ASCA board of directors in 2019, and will serve as chair of the board for the 2021 through 2022 year. Richard has presented at various local, state and national conferences on topics, including comprehensive school counseling programs, ramp diversity and inclusion, supervision, and creativity and counseling. Today, we'll sit down with Richard to learn more about him, his vision for ASCA, and some other fun things like maybe his favorite [inaudible 00:02:02]. Welcome Richard, thanks so much for joining us today.

Richard Tench:

Thanks for having me, Jen, look forward to talking to you today.

Jen Walsh:

Great. Well, let's dive right into these questions. We are excited to get to know you a little bit better. So can you share your background? How did you get into the school counseling profession and what led you to ASCA?

Richard Tench:

So my school counseling profession really started in undergraduate. I went to school and I was going to be this biochemist and do great things. And I was introduced to a psychology course and fell in love with that. And while working on my undergrad degree, I came in contact with a school counselor educator who kind of I've befriended over my time at undergrad, then went to grad school where she taught and that's kind of what led me into school counseling. It's just a profession that I found where I could really make a great impact. And the work really resonated with me. And I felt like it was a great match. So I had been a school counselor for four or five years before I really dove into my state association. I felt like after four or five years, my feet were pretty wet. I knew what I was doing. I had a pretty solid foundation.

So I got involved in my state association who at the time were just really looking for people to help lead. They needed some individuals, some upcoming leaders to help move that organization along. So I volunteered and ran one of those positions here in West Virginia and started becoming part of that leadership team. And it was actually the first year that I was on the executive board that they invited me to attend my first conference in Phoenix. So that's really where I got my first taste of what ASCA was all about. And what ASCA did for school counselors.

Before attending ASCA, I was doing a pretty good job at my job. I had dabbled in ASCA, looked at the website, but really when I went to Phoenix for the first time and was in the moment and surrounded by all those individuals that had the same passion was really where my ASCA journey started. And since then, I haven't let back. ASCA, what they do, the supports they offer, their trainings are what help educate me, guide my program. I'm trying to do the same keeping in contact with my state to help them really follow all of the benefits that ASCA can offer us.

Jen Walsh:

Great. Yeah. I know we often hear about that with the conference. People just walk away so energized and excited about being in the profession and excited to get back to their school and really impact students. And I feel that same way about the conference. It's such a great experience, I think for us as staff at ASCA as well. So what is your favorite part of your job as a school counselor?

Richard Tench:

My absolute favorite part are those moments when you see the aha moment in your students. Part of being a school counselor and I think part that makes it great is that you're never going to have this same day twice. Some days may be real calm, quiet. You can go on whatever you're scheduled to do that day. Other days, you're putting out lots of little fires, but the job's never boring. And there's always someone that's needing you and when we can make those moments, whether it be in a classroom with a lesson or if we're having trouble and we're working with a student individually, just having those aha moments where you really see students and sometimes even parents, turn that page in the book to, "Yeah, we need to start over. Here's our new plan." So that's really what drives me to do what I do and is the favorite part of my job because you've had that impact on that student or those groups of students.

Jen Walsh:

Definitely. So we all know that ASCAs vision is to expand the image and influence of school counselors through advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change, and to empower school counselors with the knowledge, skills, linkages, and resources to promote student success in the school, the home and the community and the world really, but do have your own unique vision for ASCA as the incoming board chair?

Richard Tench:

I wouldn't say I have my own unique vision. I definitely 100% share that vision because school counselors are amazing people. We are an amazing group of people that have the ability to do amazing things. And I think that's where my passion lies. And it's within this statement where it's there where we still have work to do when it comes to the advocacy and leadership piece and teaching all school counselors to be advocates and leaders, and really assert that comprehensive school counsel program is an integral part of the educational system. Unfortunately, that sentiment is not shared by all of those in the educational system at this time. And it's going to be a work in progress and we've got lots of work to do, and some places are doing it better than others. So often I'm talking to my colleagues across the country where they're doing this laundry list of things that aren't really counseling duties.

And it hurts because I think what could they be doing if they weren't doing what they're being assigned to do. So really teaching those counselors and providing the opportunity for them to learn those skills so they can go to their local districts or their principal, or even at the state level to kind of help educate and influence some of the decision making process. So the school counselors can solely focus on the work of school counselors, especially after we've gone through these past couple of years, it's been rough and this is really a time where we need to focus on SEL and mental health of our students and school counselors need that freedom to run their program so that they can affect those students, their communities, and all of those stakeholders that they connect with at that level.

Jen Walsh:

Absolutely. Thank you for sharing. All right. So summarize your favorite most impactful lesson that you've ever given as a school counselor.

Richard Tench:

So this one was hard when you think back of everything I've done in a classroom, one that I really enjoy, and I do it mostly with our ninth graders that come in that are in our high school 101, which is a freshman orientation kind of class I've entitled it, Who Are You? And through this lesson, I really have them examine who they are as individuals, their beliefs and their story and where they come from. Through this I kind of explain to them that once you get to high school, a lot of decisions are made and it's important that you know who you are and you're making a decision for you that you're not making a decision for a friend group or that you're not making a decision because that's what your parents wants you to do or what someone else is encouraging you to do.

So I really take time with this lesson to get to who they are at the core, encouraging them to be themselves, encouraging them to be honest with themselves about strengths and weaknesses and things moving forward in life. So I think that's crucial. And especially when they're ninth graders, they're trying to fit in. They're trying to find that social group and their place in the high school hierarchy, but if they can learn to be individuals and be who they are, I think it helps them stay on that path to success.

Jen Walsh:

What sort of prompts or questions that sort of thing do you ask for them to really get to the root of who they are?

Richard Tench:

I mean, some of them, we will look at some sort of statements, like how did you grow up? Looking at a family structure. When decisions are made, what sort of thought process do you go through? Some decisions that really just have them examine parts of their everyday life and moments that they can really reflect internally on how they feel about certain things. And I wish I had in front of me right now, there are also some questions that we really assess their feelings on certain issues and have them and examine those against that, of their peer group. Or do your parents feel the same way just as a way to allow them the space to be individuals and understand that it's okay not to have the same thought processes, the same feelings or the same assumptions as those around you.

Jen Walsh:

That's awesome. Like you said, that's such a great time to really have those conversations as they're making that big transition. Is there a quote that you use or that you live by?

Richard Tench:

Mine is simple and I don't know if anyone said it, I don't know who would've quote it, but mine is live your truth and I'm not going to go into it in great detail right here. Those that are listening. Those that know me have heard a lot of my personal story and would probably understand why live your truth is relevant to me because for years I couldn't or didn't think I could rather, it's a very personal story for me. And like I said, that could be a whole podcast by itself, but living your truth and living who you are and not being afraid of that to day to day, I think is definitely true for me now. And it's a quote that I would tell my students as well.

Jen Walsh:

Thank you for sharing that is really impactful. What is the best thing that's happened in the last week?

Richard Tench:

The best thing that happened last week was a long weekend last weekend. Just some time to relax, enjoy, got to go see my family. So that was my highlight.

Jen Walsh:

That is true. It's always nice to have a long weekend for sure. What is something that you're looking forward to?

Richard Tench:

I'm looking forward for.. And I know I'll probably have some of those out there that will look at me differently after this, but I'm looking for summer to be over and for fall slash autumn weather to get here. In West Virginia, it's hot, it's humid, it's uncomfortable in the summer. It's not pleasant. On the flip side of that, when our foliage starts to change in fall slash Autumn, it's the most beautiful scenery ever. It's one of the best parts about West Virginia, seeing that foliage in the mountains, as it changes into its golds and oranges and reds and the temperature drops and the humidity goes away. But I'm looking forward for official summer season to come to an end.

Jen Walsh:

You are right. The fall season in West Virginia is gorgeous. If you could change three things in the world, what would they be?

Richard Tench:

That's a very broad question. I feel like I'm Miss America. [inaudible 00:13:49] those questions. One thing that I would definitely change is the lack of empathy I see in the world. I feel that there's so many people that either don't have the ability or simply refuse to understand the positions of others and be empathetic toward the needs of others. While we have so many people doing so well all in our world, we have so many people that are doing not well that need help, and it's not up to any single individual or single country to offer that help its humanity I think that needs to step up. So an increase in empathy would be one. Second, which kind of parallels would be this wholeness that I wish people could wrap their head around.

Our society is so me versus them anymore. And it seems like these fractions are just everywhere. And if you're not part of this fraction, you must be part of another, but we're all the human race. We're all here to be able to enjoy our lives as one. And I think that it's important through all sectors of this world, business, education, that there needs to be this wholeness, that whatever goal you're working toward, that's your team, that's who you're working with. The me, them mentality, I feel just causes greater divides systemically throughout our world.

And a third thing I would really like to see quality education. Obviously I'm not as knowledgeable about education around the world, but I see the inequality of education here in our country. And until we start giving everyone quality education and equitable education, I don't know when things will change. If we don't give the opportunity, it's hard for us to expect future generations to be better than us. So I think it's this generation's turn. And our turn as humans to work toward providing that education that all students deserve, not just here in the U.S. but around the world.

Jen Walsh:

I think those three answers, honestly, if those don't get to the heart of school counseling, I don't know what would. Empathy that you mentioned and being able to see other people's perspectives? I mean, those are two, I think almost verbatim student standards, that school counselors are fostering those skills and our students. So I think that just really, gets to the heart of school counseling and the importance that we have and the important potential impact that we have on the education system, which was your third thing. So great answers there. So as a current school counselor, what are the three things you try to teach your kids that you think makes school more useful for them?

Richard Tench:

I'll keep this one short, be authentic, challenge themselves and to become problem solvers. I think if all three are done in conjunction, they can succeed in any arena going forward past high school, being able to make those big decisions, get out of their comfort zone and solve those problems, I think are just foundational pieces that set them up well to succeed no matter what they choose post secondary education.

Jen Walsh:

Fantastic. Thank you for that. So this is probably the most important question during this interview. What is your go-to Starbucks order?

Richard Tench:

And this is probably where the most people are going to judge people, because they're going to think orders are weird. It's going to be a vanilla iced latte with coconut milk, an extra shot of espresso.

Jen Walsh:

I think that sounds delicious.

Richard Tench:

It is.

Jen Walsh:

Yeah. I'll have to give that a try. All right. What are you reading right now? If anything.

Richard Tench:

Right now I've just started. I'm not too far into it. So the details to share are limited, it is a memoir called Educated by Tara Westover. And it is an account of her growing up in the wilderness, the daughter of survivalists and her basically educating herself and her self innovation to survive. And later in her story, she becomes college educated. So it takes you from her being a born survivalist to being a college educated woman is the premise of the book of the memoir. I'm only a little bit into it, but so far it's a very good piece.

Jen Walsh:

So she had no formal education?

Richard Tench:

Right. Yeah, she never stepped into a formal classroom until the age of 17.

Jen Walsh:

Wow.

Richard Tench:

And now she has a PhD from Cambridge.

Jen Walsh:

I'll have to look into that. What is something about yourself that would surprise people?

Richard Tench:

I'm a thrill seeker. I love whitewater rafting. I've been skydiving a couple of times. Wouldn't mind going again. Bungee jumping. All of those things are right up my alley.

Jen Walsh:

Roller coasters?

Richard Tench:

Yes.

Jen Walsh:

All right. That sounds fun. I don't think I could skydive or bungee jump, but I guess I could see the appeal. Where did you do the bungee jumping? Because I feel like I've seen that advertised for West Virginia. Maybe I'm making it up.

Richard Tench:

No, it occurs during Bridge Day over the [inaudible 00:19:43] bridge. It's the longest expansion bridge in the country. And every day in the fall, we hold a big event in West Virginia for Bridge Day where your free base jumpers will be jumping off the bridge. Then they do the bungee and you can repel off the bridge, just a bunch of bridge things.

Jen Walsh:

Okay. So it was there. That's where you did it?

Richard Tench:

Yeah. It's a really cool event. Yeah.

Jen Walsh:

That's awesome. Okay. All right. So we are going to do a quick and fun series of this or that. Just to again, get to know you better and hopefully make you laugh a little bit. Camping or glamping?

Richard Tench:

Camping.

Jen Walsh:

Fiction or non-fiction?

Richard Tench:

Fiction.

Jen Walsh:

Beach or mountains?

Richard Tench:

Beach.

Jen Walsh:

Okay. You hesitated there, but I guess because you're in the mountains, right?

Richard Tench:

Yeah. I live in the mountains. Renting a cabin, or going to a cabin an hour away, I mean, I guess it feels a different mountain range. Maybe if I went out to Colorado, mountains would be a little different story.

Jen Walsh:

Exactly. Okay. I feel you. I knew where you were going. Okay. Time machine or magic wand?

Richard Tench:

Definitely a magic wand.

Jen Walsh:

All right. Hot coffee or iced coffee?

Richard Tench:

Normally iced coffee.

Jen Walsh:

Okay. Ketchup or ranch?

Richard Tench:

Neither.

Jen Walsh:

What?

Richard Tench:

Sorry, once again, I'm an odd ball, neither.

Jen Walsh:

Sorry. You're just anti sauce in general?

Richard Tench:

Not anti sauce, but if I had to pick one of those, I would lean toward the Ranch.

Jen Walsh:

Okay. Winter or summer?

Richard Tench:

Summer.

Jen Walsh:

Even though you hated it on summer earlier?

Richard Tench:

I hated it on summer, but I hate the snow worse.

Jen Walsh:

No, I agree. Yes. Okay. Guacamole or salsa?

Richard Tench:

Definitely guac. A hundred percent.

Jen Walsh:

Free travel for one year or free lodging for five years?

Richard Tench:

We'll go with free lodging for five.

Jen Walsh:

Okay. All right. Well, thank you so much for being a good sport and participating in that. We are going to wrap up with a question that we actually ask really everyone who is on this podcast and that is what inspires or motivates you.

Richard Tench:

I think it's a combo of my students and my colleagues. Every day, looking at these students I picture myself when I was their age and I can't help, but reminisce back and think that life seems so much simpler for me when I was in high school, compared to what these students are going through now. I feel like the challenges are so much greater for them than I ever experienced, which inspires me to be that much better, because if they're going through so much more, I have to be that much better for them. I have to figure out how to provide the services, provide what they need and give them the support they need. And a lot of that inspiration comes from my colleagues here and the colleagues I met throughout the country, in my work with ASCA, just the amazing things and the amazing resources and the amazing minds we have in the field of school counseling.

So it's really a combination just to ensure that these students have the best of resources, the best of a counseling program, the best of me every day, and doing it in a innovative way that makes it meaningful for them because students don't want to come to the school counselor. They're not always excited when we come into the room, but I think part of our job is to make it exciting for them and to see that what we have to offer to teach them or things that they're going to leave the classroom with and stick with them, hopefully for the rest of our lives, as they leave our building and go on to the real world.

And sometimes I feel the pressure as a high school counselor, knowing that we've got four years to teach them a set of skills, that they can walk across that stage with a diploma and know that they can survive in the real world. And that's scary sometimes when you think, have we taught them enough? Do they have all the tools, but that's really what motivates me is ensuring that these young men and women are going to walk out the door and be successful in whatever they choose.

Jen Walsh:

It's really well said. Well, thank you Richard, for joining us today, we are really excited to welcome you as the new chair to the ASCA board of directors. And thank you all for listening. We hope to have you back for 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 all on our social media platforms. Find us on Facebook at the American School Counselor Association, Twitter at ASCA tweets and Instagram at we are ASCA. Thanks 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.