

*We are delighted that Jesse Ruben will join us
as Musician in Residence at the
2022 BCPVPA Connecting Leaders
Conference, October 20 – 22
at the Victoria Conference Centre.*

*BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning and
Development, Andrea McComb, spoke with
Jesse about stepping outside of his
own comfort zone, and how it inspired him
to invite others out of theirs.*



Courtesy Jesse Ruben

WE CAN: A Kind of Wonderful Thing

Jesse Ruben has become the person he himself wanted to meet as a quiet, shy, creative kid. Somebody to inspire him. Somebody to believe in him. Somebody to see in him, his gift of creativity. Somebody who was not his family. Jesse says, "If only someone that wasn't my parent or teacher had come to my school to tell me that it's okay and that all those things are totally normal and okay. I wish someone had just given me permission to be myself."

Jesse is a singer/songwriter from Philadelphia who currently lives in Brooklyn, NY. He writes songs that make a difference for people. He plays music for a living, and has created the We Can Project program for kids. To date, thousands of students across the US and Canada have participated in The We Can Project, and the number of schools involved continues to grow every year.

Jesse tells his story:

"I ran the New York City Marathon because I was raising money and awareness for spinal cord research for one of my best friends who has been in a wheelchair since we were about 18. I really wanted to make a difference. I wanted to do something to help spinal cord research; I started talking to one of the charities, and they invited me to run the marathon. The first time they asked I said no; and then, they asked again, and I said no. And then, they asked again, and I said yes, hung up my phone, and then screamed because I was terrified. I was not a runner.

"I was a nerdy, quiet, shy, creative kid who was terrified to be in my own skin. Training for and running the marathon, I really learned a lot about the limitations I had placed on myself, and the amazing reward you get from being committed to something big and scary over a long period of time.

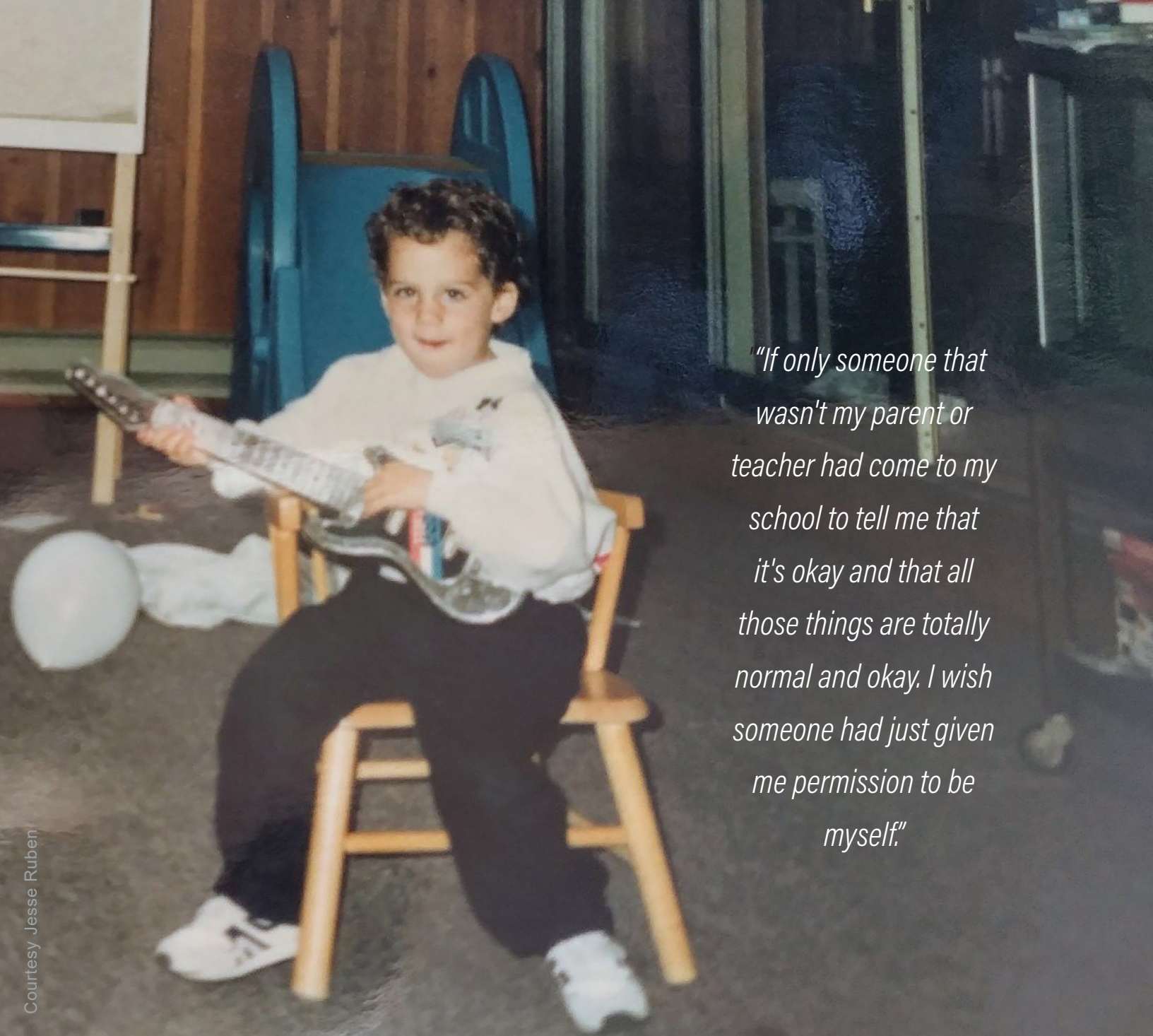
"I wrote a song that gives people permission to do crazy things. I released it. I inspired some people to run, and I received some nice messages. One day, I got an email from a teacher named Jen Turner in Vancouver Island in Canada. She said, "Jesse, I was just writing to let you know we found your song, and

*A service learning initiative that
inspires and profoundly connects
students of all ages to the difference
they can make in their lives, their
communities, and in the world.*

www.wecanwecanwecan.com

THE WE CAN PROJECT

Andrea McComb
*Director of Professional
Learning & Development
BCPVPA*



Courtesy Jesse Ruben

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we've been playing it for our students, and they really love it and they've really connected to it, because the theme of the song is 'we can', and it's about doing crazy, scary things. I promised my students I would ask you if you would want to come visit us".

I am in my apartment in Brooklyn, thinking this is the best email I've ever gotten in my life. I agreed to go visit.

It took three airplanes, and the last one was a six-seater. I landed in Comox, and got off the plane to

see 400 kids and their parents at the airport waiting for me. It was such a special experience to be so far away from home, and to have a response like that. What a special place, and what a special community. I still get chills when I see the music video we produced at Puntledge Park Elementary. I got back to New York, and other teachers started watching the video, and I was getting emails asking, can you come do that here?

"I was getting enough reaction to it that I started calling my educator friends and I said this is what

I'm trying to do: I really want to make a difference, and what's the best way to do that? We created the We Can Project, based on the song. It is a service learning and a growth mindset program. We really want to give young people an opportunity to give back to their communities, where they live, and to teach kids at a young age so that they can make positive changes in their communities. We wanted to give kids opportunities to explore things that they've never tried, whether that's creativity or athletics or language or meeting and making friends.

I went back to Vancouver Island three times over four years, and it is one of my favourite places on the planet. It is amazing to think that creativity is a superpower, because I wrote that song in an apartment in Brooklyn, and on the other side of North America this entire school had planned the whole school year around this song in a way that I never would have imagined when I was writing it.

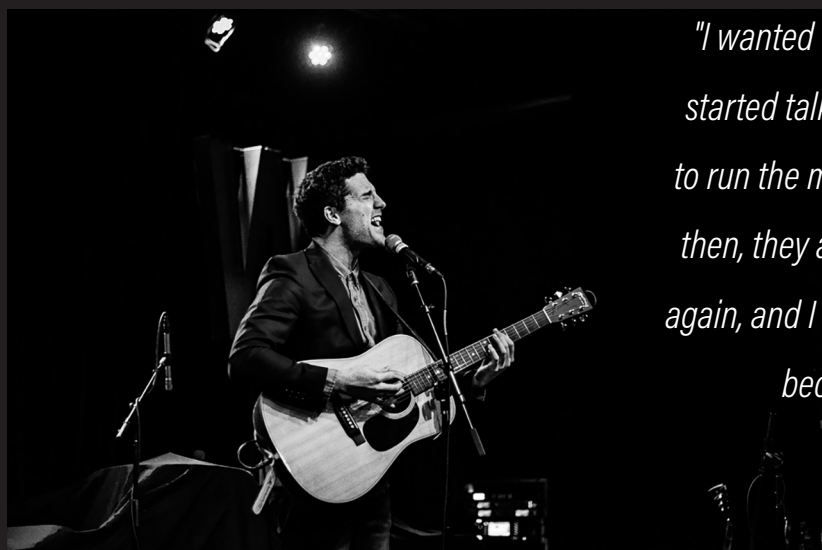
"The We Can Project website is filled with resources. We have sheet music and the lyrics in a bunch of languages. We have project ideas broken down by grade, lesson plans, and online worksheets. We have an sample timeline of what you can do throughout the year. It is all free.

I have visited schools everywhere, from some of the poorest to the wealthiest school districts in the country. The thing that I really love is no matter what socio-economic background, culture, city, country, farmland area, Native American communities, South Side of Chicago – this song, and this message, works.

"We work with each school to figure out what works for them. My desire is to connect with people through these songs and stories, and to share my experiences. I have spoken to students who have told me doing the We Can Project was the first time anyone had ever asked them what they were interested in. There was a student at a school I went to who was completely nonverbal. He never spoke. He had two aides that were with him all day. He was a sweet kid. The first time any of his teachers or classmates heard him say a word was singing We Can. Everyone was crying.

"There was a school in Mississauga outside of Toronto whose We Can Project was 'we can build a house'. Over the summer, one of the families in the community lost their house to fire. Throughout the school year, the school did fundraisers. The teachers and students would go and literally hammer in the boards and the nails. In May that year, we presented this giant cheque from Habitat for Humanity to the family. What was amazing was that it was not one of the teachers or the Principal who thought of it. It was a third-grader. His classmate was one of the children in the family. That is what is so great about young people, this third-grader said, "We can build them a house", and the teacher said, "Oh, I don't know, that's a lot". The other students responded, "Why not?" I get to see people push themselves outside of their comfort zone and see what's on the other side of it. And on the other side of that is just miraculous."

If you are interested in Jesse visiting your school as part of his BC tour October 2022, please reach out to him through his website: www.jesseruben.com



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WE CAN by Jesse Ruben

A lot of people doubted me

They laughed in my face

Said there ain't no way

I would finish that race

But I kept my head down

And laced up my shoes

I ran a marathon,

When no one thought I could

I didn't always want to

But I said that I would

And I learned a lot about what I can do

It doesn't matter if they don't believe

It doesn't matter if they do not understand

Cause every dream that I'm trying to achieve

I can, I can, I can

I can, I can, I can

So make a list and do not make it brief

Write down every single wish

and every little thing that you want

Don't sell yourself short

Don't ever hesitate if people turn you down

Do not settle, do not wait, don't ever turn around

Cause you're almost there, I swear

I swear it's yours



Watch the video recorded at Puntledge Park Elementary
bit.ly/WeCanWeCanWeCan

And all that matters is there's no regrets
It doesn't matter if they do not understand
Cause everything you want you haven't gotten yet
You can, you can, you can
You can, you can, you can
Right now on this planet there are things that we can fix
There are people going hungry, a lot of them are kids
And it's so unfair
They're scared and all alone
Wars are being fought over land and over God
And we need a different plan,
Cause I think that we've forgot

That we're all the same
We're just love and blood and bones
It doesn't matter if they think we're wrong
It doesn't matter if they do not understand
Cause every obstacle we need to overcome.
We can, we can, we can
It doesn't matter if they think we're wrong
It doesn't matter if they do not understand
Cause every obstacle we need to overcome.
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