

THE MIND INSIDE EPISODE 1 | FILM TRANSCRIPT

TITLE CARD	The students portrayed in this film, along with their families, have graciously granted us permission to share their stories.
SALLY NELLSON	Well, I think a lot of times, people think about mental health and schools when there's been a school shooting, and people say, "Well, it's either guns, or it's mental health," and it's probably everything, but if you think about the possible interventions along the way for any kid that would...
ERIC DEPUE	Turn into something like that?
SALLY NELLSON	Yeah. What responsibility is that of the schools, and what are all the – you know?
ERIC DEPUE	That's a tough question. I think that's part of the problem of that whole issue, is we don't really know. I mean, there's no great answers, 'cause I feel like if there was a great answer, we'd have figured it out by now.
ERIC DEPUE	[Phone ringing] This is Mr. Depue.
SALLY NELLSON	Hi. This is Sally Nellson with Nebraska Loves Public Schools. How are you?
ERIC DEPUE	I'm doing well. What can I help you with?
SALLY NELLSON	One of the things that we've found is that people don't understand what happens in a counselor's office on a regular basis. We're trying to capture that, so people can see what you do and the kinds of things that students bring to you every day.
ERIC DEPUE	Whatever we can do to help, I'd be more than happy to.
SALLY NELLSON	Great. Well, let's maybe look at some dates.
ERIC DEPUE	My name is Eric Depue, and I am a school social worker with Millard North Middle School in their counseling department. If a kid goes to public school, we as educators and as social workers and as teachers are tasked with educating the child, and I'm sorry, but a kid who has trauma and has been in a terrible situation, I mean, I can give you story after story of kids who walk in my office, 'cause the teacher is upset with 'em and sent 'em out because they're messing around, they're goofing off, or they're not prepared, or their homework's not complete, but, well, guess what happened at home last night? You know? And those are things that are out of our control.
SECRETARY	Hey buddy, how are you?
STUDENT 1	Horrible.
SECRETARY	Aw, come here. Like a problem with your mom? Yeah is there anything we can do to help?

ERIC DEPUE	Imagine your life is a track, and your end goal is to graduate and to get an education. Well, most kids don't have a lot of barriers, don't have a lot of obstacles. I deal with the kids who have a frickin' moat across the thing, and they have to somehow figure out how to get across there to get even an education where they can graduate someday. And so like that's how I look at it sometimes and explain it to kids, is like, "I'm here to help you remove those barriers, or to go around or find a unique way to get through life, so you can get an education," 'cause ultimately, that's why we're here, absolutely, is to teach them. But I'm sorry, I see on a firsthand basis, day after day after day, there are kids who are unable to sit in math class and learn a formula when something terrible happened to them or they have a mental health issue or they're suicidal. It's not gonna happen. It's not.
	[Crosstalk]
ERIC DEPUE	– see what Nicole says.
STAFF MEMBER 1	Yeah, the afternoon of the 31st, or I'll e-mail Nicole _____.
STAFF MEMBER 2	Mr. Depue?
ERIC DEPUE	Yep?
STAFF MEMBER 2	Can you go track down {INAUDIBLE}? Last time he was seen was the boy's bathroom...
ERIC DEPUE	Ok... Something like that...
STAFF MEMBER 2	He went to the bathroom, and so I went...
ERIC DEPUE	And then he tried to come back in?
STAFF MEMBER 2	Well than he tried to go back to class, and I said no you're going to the office, and he said then I'll walk myself and then I said no you can't, and then he sat back down and refused to go.
ERIC DEPUE	Ok. Ok, I'll give you a little more privacy, why don't you sit in here for a few minutes to calm down, ok?
ERIC DEPUE	What's going on? What happened?
STUDENT 2	I was grabbing my homework cuz I didn't have it. And I know that's my fault. And then I was just grabbing my homework cuz I had a pass and then I was gonna go right back to class... And then she gets mad at me. She's like, go down to the office. But I don't, like I wasn't doing anything wrong. I was just grabbing my homework.

ERIC DEPUE	Okay. So I'll just tell you what she told me because I wasn't there. I didn't see what happened, and I'm obviously I'm not an expert on that. She said that you, I don't know if she found you or saw you down, maybe you were going to get your stuff in your locker and you were talking to a girl or talking to somebody?
STUDENT 2	No, she just said hi and then she left.
ERIC DEPUE	So whatever – you talked and you said hi, then when you went back to class, it is my understanding that you got frustrated with Ms. Dickie –
STUDENT 2	I didn't even say anything to Ms. Dickie when I went back to class.
ERIC DEPUE	I'm sure you got really frustrated with her and once you see red and you're really angry, it's hard to backtrack and stop yourself, right?
STUDENT 2	Sometimes, when I get frustrated, like people can tell that I'm frustrated. Like, anyone even if they don't know me will like get... Once people know they're like just stay away from me because if I'm frustrated, I'll yell at you or something, like without meaning anything I say.
ERIC DEPUE	You just get kinda hot. That's the hard thing about being a teacher, though. Cuz like, Ms. Dickie, she can't just leave you alone, you know. Her job does not allow her to say well _____ is upset so I'm just not going to interact with him. To a certain degree we encourage teachers, hey man, give him some space, right? And let you calm down. But in a room where you have 25 kids in there and she's trying to do things or whatever, like she can't always just let it go, you know? You said you want to have a good day. I want you to have a good day, too. So I would suggest, if she gives you a consequence, just do your best to kind of accept it and not make it a bigger deal, you know? Hey, Mrs...
STAFF MEMBER	I'm on my way over to your office...
ERIC DEPUE	Perfect. So I would suggest, if she gives you a consequence, just do your best to kind of accept it and not make it a bigger deal, you know?
STAFF MEMBER	Alright so for tonight and tomorrow you need to stay for after-school detention
ERIC DEPUE	Do you want to call mom? Or do you...
STAFF MEMBER	Let's call mom.
ERIC DEPUE	So we actually had a really good conversation, and I'm sure the email explained what his consequence was... but he and I, once he calmed down we had a really good conversation...

	<p>So you're talking about a kid who over time, we have observed and we have collected data on, maybe how many times he's been sent to the office or how many times he's been disruptive in class or you know et cetera, et cetera. And we decided that this is a student who rises above the threshold of what's normal, maybe, and they need additional supports to help with that issue, and so we might get Terra, our school psych. involved, and she might say, "Hey, this kid's got a behavior issue. We need to put services in place to ameliorate those problems." I think for a lot of those at-risk kids, we are the one constant where they can go, where people are gonna care for them, and people are going to ask them how their day was, and they're gonna get a hot meal, and they're gonna learn a thing or two. And even more so, when the schools identify, "Hey, we're worried about this student for whatever reason," then we can address it with different services.</p>
BILL JELKIN	<p>Thank you all for being here this morning, we're going to talk about some business from the last agenda...</p> <p>My name is Bill Jelkin. I'm the director of student services for Miller Public Schools. I oversee counseling, social work, school nursing, enrollment, school security, and discipline.</p> <p>The conversations that I have with a student, with students, is beneficial.</p> <p>Mental health in the school setting is unique. Oftentimes, kids come to us with a whole host of other problems, whether they've experienced trauma in their life, whether they're experiencing peer frustrations, anxiety, depression, all of those things. And as an educational institution, our number-one goal is to obviously educate them, but we have to have them ready to learn, and in some cases, all of those other issues are standing in the way of the education.</p>
STAFF MEMBER	<p>I was thinking though like more what is the family dynamics? What is the demographic of that?</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>Oh, I think there's a lot of trauma. There's a lot of baggage that we deal with, with a lot of the kids we have. I mean, I can't think of very many kids – and that's part of the problem, is we have these kids without follow-through necessarily at home.</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>I think if you were to go in the community and ask, "Tell me about Millard," they would say Millard is historically an affluent district, West Omaha, you know the rich kids.</p>
BILL JELKIN	<p>The 10 social workers that we have, their job description and their job focus has changed dramatically over the time that I've been in this position, because we've been preparing for a different type of student in Millard.</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>We're getting a lot more kids from different backgrounds and different cultures and different religions and different languages and refugees.</p>
BILL JELKIN	<p>We understand the challenges that some families are gonna start to bring to us. The goal in my office was to have structures in place and have systems in place to help address those. Those systems need to accommodate for academic failure. They need to accommodate for behavior issues and the basic needs of kids. Some of the steps we've taken in Millard is we partnered with Connections here at Project Harmony to have a direct-line referral source for our K-through-8 students to get immediate mental health assistance.</p>
STAFF MEMBER 1	<p>I had a counselor email me yesterday regarding a student, and I believe it would be an appropriate referral for connections because this student—her mom recently lost a baby, um, and the student had been talking a lot about her mom's pregnancy and the parent has lost the</p>

	<p>baby in an addition to the mother losing the baby, this student is not able to have a relationship with her dad because he is in prison so there's a lot of dynamics. She's an only child in the home, this mom works part time, she doesn't have a lot of resources available to her--</p>
STAFF MEMBER 2	<p>Are you thinking of individual therapy or group?</p>
STAFF MEMBER 1	<p>Well I think with this particular student we'd start with individual...</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>Connections is this amazing program. When I have a kid who I'm really worried about, for whatever reason, I think they'd benefit from counseling or therapy in the community, but there's barriers. Those barriers might be mom and dad work at night, or they don't have all the financial means to provide for the therapy, or maybe the parents are on board, but they don't have a ride after school to get to therapy. And so what I do is I get parental consent, which allows me to communicate with Connections, and then I fill out a form, a referral form with my concerns.</p>
DEB ANDERSON PAPIS	<p>My name is Deb Anderson Papis, and I'm the senior director of early intervention and training at Project Harmony. What we know is 60 percent of all kids, all kids, 0 to 18 are exposed to some sort of violence every year. The violence that we talk about ranges from seeing violence in their community. It could be bullying in the school. It could be domestic violence at home. It could be that they are themselves victims of abuse or neglect at home. We also know that 20 percent of children who are diagnosed with a mental health problem don't get services. The most common diagnoses are ADHD, depression, anxiety, and conduct disorder, so those are some of the diagnoses we see where children need assistance, and they're not getting the help that they need. I think the concern that we hear, and we hear it a lot, is do we wanna label a child with a mental illness and give them a diagnosis that they then carry with them all the way through the rest of their lives, potentially?</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>So I'm not gonna use her name, but I'll talk about a student. The deck's kind of stacked against her, in a sense. Dad is not – is in the picture, but not really in the picture. Current stepfather's an alcoholic. There's a lot of kids in the home, just a wonderful, wonderful kid. It pains me to see kids have to work so hard to deal with stuff, that they're innocent. They're 12, 13-year-old kids. Like, why have to deal with that? And it's hard for me sometimes, 'cause I never had to deal with the adversity that some of these kids go through.</p> <p>You guys have lived a pretty complicated – like you've had some complications through – with family stuff, and from Fremont to moving here, and mom and all those things, and it's pretty remarkable, how resilient you guys are, 'cause you deal with stuff that most – like I never had to worry about stuff like that, you know? You come to school, you have a good attitude, you're fun, keep yourself out of trouble – most the time.</p>
STUDENT 3	<p>I mean, there's some days where, like, my depression is, like, on the top. And like, I'll just be like, not okay. Like, I won't even try and get ready in the morning.</p>
ERIC DEPUE	<p>I know, you missed a lot of school this year.</p>
STUDENT 3	<p>Yeah.</p>

SALLY NELLSON	How does it affect her grades?
ERIC DEPUE	When... her grades aren't good. She's capable, but when you don't have the structure, or the importance level of academics are different for different families, and for some families, maybe getting your homework done is not a priority at home, or maybe that's not even talked about. You get home, and it's survival mode, or you get home, and it's, "Hey, you gotta take care of your little sibling, so I can go to work." There's a lot of different things. That's kind of some of the things that she does. She doesn't have a lot of like parental motivation to say, "Get your stuff done."
BILL JELKIN	What we're talking about is every fall, during Suicide Awareness Month, we require all of our counselors to talk to every kid, so they usually put 'em in a group, and they give a presentation about suicide and depression. They administer a three-question screener, and if a student answers in a positive manner on that screener, then it flags 'em, and then they have to have an individual conversation with the counselor.
ERIC DEPUE	The majority of 'em, at least at my middle school level, it's kids who don't – either don't understand what depression is, suicidal thinking – they're worried about someone else, but the kids who are really severely struggling with something, then yeah, we refer them to Connections or to a private counselor or to Immanuel in certain cases and stuff like that.
SALLY NELLSON	You say the words mental health, and I think a lot of people hear mental illness. How do you define mental health in your job, in your school?
ERIC DEPUE	That's a tough question. I'm a strong believer that each and every person at some point in their life would probably benefit from some kind of talk therapy, but we live in a society where mental health, mental illness is misunderstood.
DEB ANDERSON PAPIS	When we start using the terminology mental illness, everybody gets nervous about that, especially when we start talking about children, and I think that there is a perception that mental illness means there is something seriously wrong, that it's pervasive. It's severe. This person maybe is not functioning, and we need to – I think that's part of the stigma around this whole issue of mental health and mental illness. All of us have traumatic events that we go through. We should just expect that that's a normal part of living, is that we're gonna go through difficult times, and we all may need therapy at one point or another, but we don't always just need therapy. It could be something else. For some people, yoga gets them through a difficult time. For some people, it's church that gets them through a difficult time, so it doesn't always have to be therapy as the be all, end all, but it should be one of the things that we consider in the toolbox of helping people to be healthy.
BILL JELKIN	Mental health training for certificated staff, so last year, that issue was brought to my attention numerous times, teachers saying, "We need more training, so we know how to handle these types of kids in our classroom."
CAREY STARNES	I'm Carey Starnes, and I teach sixth-grade English for Millard North Middle School.
SALLY NELLSON	So when you hear the term mental health, what does that conjure for you?

<p>CAREY STARNES</p>	<p>Well, to me, what I picture is when you have good mental health, that means that you are able to thrive in a classroom and in school, but if you have poor mental health or you have some struggles with it, then you're going to hit some obstacles, but it's all different for every kid, so as a teacher, you have to be able to pick up on that and know how to try to deal with it.</p> <p>Remember what did we notice about the little people activity? When we look up there, Collin? They're all different. Why is that important? Because we talked about this. Uh, Maddie. Because no one is the same, is that good or is that bad?</p>
<p>SALLY NELLSON</p>	<p>What are the biggest obstacles that your profession faces in trying to teach all kids and help the ones in particular that need the most help?</p>
<p>CAREY STARNES</p>	<p>I think that building relationships is probably the big thing. When kids tend to respect you more, kids will listen to you more if you have a relationship with them. It doesn't mean that they have to like love you. They just know, "Oh, she knows who I am."</p> <p>You wanna keep it, you keep it honey. And then you'll want to color it and bring it back to me tomorrow. And people are just doing it like this, that way when we post it, it looks pretty, pretty just like you.</p> <p>I feel like we all have baggage. I come in. I have baggage, so when they come in, and I say this from the get go, is we do activities to help build us together as a family. So if you see-- I have my little people on the right. That's them, and then we always look back at that and say, "Look at us. We're all different, but we're all in it together," and then we look -- we share experiences. I share experiences, so I build a trust in here, so then if they -- they want to come in here, and I'm not tooting my own horn, but at the end of class, they're like, "I don't wanna go." Like, so I feel like I try to make it a safe environment for all, not just keeping in mind that there's probably five kiddos who have really bad stuff going on, so I make it a good environment for all, so everybody's happy, and they feel safe. It's like a mom of the classroom, if that makes any sense.</p>
<p>SALLY NELLSON</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>CAREY STARNES</p>	<p>Number 3... have you done number three yet? Oh three, right there! Good. Man, good job dude.</p>
<p>DEB ANDERSON PAPIS</p>	<p>One of the things that has helped with stigma is the ACES study¹. ACES is the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study that started in California in the '80s. It was developed by Kaiser Permanente Hospital, looking at what are some of the adverse childhood experiences that adults have had that have led them to cope in a number of ways, and weight gain is one, and tobacco use and substance use and a number of other problems, including cancer and diabetes and things like that, can happen. So the 10 adverse childhood experiences that they focused on, 5 are related to childhood. Five are related to household dysfunction. The five childhood ones are abuse and neglect, so physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and emotional neglect would be those five. And then on the household side, it's things like parent's mental health, parent's substance abuse, loss of a parent, incarceration of a parent, and domestic violence in the family. What we see in our mental health program is that it's those household dysfunction things that are leading kids to have problems with behavior in schools, that lead the schools to call us and want a referral.</p>
<p>ANNOUNCER</p>	<p>Good morning Mustangs, we need the following students to the counseling office: Bethany-</p>

STUDENT 4	I've moved a lot. I've been to seven different schools.
ERIC DEPUE	Seven different schools. Have you ever really, truly, got to like build relationships? They're always moving, so from district to district, from place to place. She came here late this last year, late into the year, so she didn't know anybody.
STUDENT 4	It's not normal. Like, one day I'm in Colorado, the next day I'm with my grandma. The next day I'm with my mom. One day I'm in Colorado with my mom, with my grandma, you know, back and forth.
ERIC DEPUE	She has had a lot of things that she's dealt with, and a lot of chaotic things happening at home. Mom's often gone, either late at night working, or she's out with friends or at a boyfriend's house or whatever, and she and her younger brother are home by themselves.
STUDENT 4	I texted my mom and I said: love you very, very much, mom. I want you to know that. But you're always gone, we never hang out. I want you to be happy in going over to his house every now and then is fine. But they're like a drug, mom. They take you away from your family and you drink when you're with them. You're going to end up in jail if you don't stop going over there every night. And there's not gonna be anything anybody can do about it, mom. It's your actions. It's your choice. Just like what you told me when we got kicked out of the apartments. Your choices affect not only you but the people who love and care about you. And this is hard to say but by the time I'm 13 years old I will not even want to speak to you. And if you keep these actions up, you don't come home at night, Grandma's going to kick you out. So... I... Wait, there's more.
ERIC DEPUE	What time did you send this?
STUDENT 4	It doesn't say. It was like... oh. 4:15.
ERIC DEPUE	In the morning?
STUDENT 4	Yeah.
ERIC DEPUE	Ok
STUDENT 4	And then... Grandma's gonna kick you out and you're going to lose your job if you keep being late. I have priorities in my life. Like my brother, okay? He's my rock, mom. No matter how many fights we get into that's my best friend. I just want you to think about how bad you're hurting us. And to be honest mom, it seems like your only priorities is boys, vodka, and money. Not kids, not family. Just having fun and partying. You shouldn't have had kids if it was gonna be like this. I know I'm only 12 but I have seen a lot more than everybody thinks I have, okay? I've been through A LOT, mom. You don't understand. I love you. Goodnight, or good morning. I don't even know at this point.

ERIC DEPUE	Did she respond?
STUDENT 4	What? No... Well, no. I don't... I mean she responded, but she was like "call me, baby." I was, I was in school. It was 8:02. She said "call me when you can, call me, okay? I love you."
ERIC DEPUE	This morning?
STUDENT 4	Yeah she said, "call me, love you." I was like mom, you have to understand I'm in school. And I didn't even get to see her this morning.
ERIC DEPUE	At first, it's kind of like, "Wow, she's a handful. She's gonna be one of those rough – not rough, but like difficult kids we work with." At one point, we were in the administrator's office, and she received a detention for something that she should've gotten a lot more, and she was throwing books and screaming, and the only person she would listen to was me, and she came in here, and I sat her down, and I said, "You need some time to cool off." After she cooled down, we went for a walk, and as we were talking, she just broke down and opened up about what she deals with. Dad's in prison, basically barely ever sees her. Mom has a lot of problems, and as I got to know her, she's just this beautiful person who just needed something, needed somebody to sit there and listen and care. And I'm not saying her mom didn't care, but I think there's times when maybe parents don't give what they need, or they don't know how to give what they need, or I'm not sure, but I might be one of the few people who understands or tries to understand what she's going through, so we'll see. I don't know. It's just really eye opening when you get to know somebody, and we don't always take the time as educators, or have the time, quite frankly, to know each and every kid on that level, 'cause most of 'em are, "Okay, yes, ma'am. Yes, sir. I'll do what you need me to do." But the ones that are really difficult and the ones that oftentimes get sent to the principal's office are the ones that maybe don't have the tools, and they don't have the skills to do what we're asking them to do.
SALLY NELLSON	If you could wave a magic wand and make everything great, what would you wanna do with it?
CAREY STARNES	You see it on Facebook all the time. We're not just a teacher. We're a counselor. We're a parent. We're all these different roles, and we need help. I mean, that's what we need help from. We need to build a system where we can just all be there just for the kids, and I wish somebody could come here and do this every – just do it one day, so they could see why we should have more help with kids that need more help.
BILL JELKIN	Schools are a constant in families' lives. Schools are a constant in kids' lives, and so we don't really mind having to tackle some of these issues, but to tackle these issues and to have the staff available to tackle some of these issues, there has to be appropriate support.
ERIC DEPUE	If I can help a kid, if I can have a kid know that there's one person who cares and will listen and will be there for him or her, that fills my bucket. That's what I do this for.
ERIC DEPUE	Do me a favor. Then I should probably get going and you should probably get back to class. If scary, unsafe things are happening to you at home, you need to tell me. Okay?
STUDENT 4	I'm good now. I live with my grandma. My grandma won't let my mom touch us.

ERIC DEPUE	I know. But you've also lived with your grandma for a little bit in the past and then you move out again, so, you need to tell me.
STUDENT 4	Now there's nowhere else for us to live, so...
ERIC DEPUE	I know that. So, if bad things are happening, please come tell me. And not like, 3 weeks later, but the next day. You good?
STUDENT 4	I don't want to go back to class.
ERIC DEPUE	I know you don't.
STUDENT 2 TITLE CARD	I've learned a lot about myself this past year. Stuff doesn't really bother me like it used to. My grades are getting better and I'm keeping busy with friends, sports, and my new baby sister.
STUDENT 3 TITLE CARD	Things are better at home. My mom is working again and I'm getting caught up in school. My depression has gotten better, but I still go to the counseling center sometimes when I need to talk.
STUDENT 4 TITLE CARD	Following a 3-day suspension, just 24 days into the new school year, her mom took her out of Millard North Middle School. They moved 60 miles away, out of their grandma's house, and enrolled in a new school.

¹ Source: CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study; Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults; Felitti, Vincent J et al. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Volume 14, Issue 4, 245-258

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