

# DCoE in Action

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## Sesame Workshop Salutes Strength of Military Families



Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton stands with Elmo and Rosita

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) provided advice to Sesame Workshop for the “Talk, Listen, Connect” series.

The recent “Talk, Listen, Connect” prime-time PBS special, “Coming Home: Military Families Cope with Change,” explored issues that military families experience as they find a “new normal” when service members return from deployment with both the visible and invisible wounds of war.

Navy Cmdr. Russell Shilling, scientific advisor for psychological health at DCoE, has worked closely with Sesame Workshop to create informational kits for the “Talk, Listen, Connect” series of three programs, which uses Muppets and documentary footage to help children cope with their parents being deployed and with

the return of a parent who has been physically or psychologically injured in combat.

“Deployments are difficult for the entire family – especially so for children,” Shilling said. “Having familiar characters like Elmo talking about the deployment process helps to reassure children and offers parents an opportunity to begin a discussion about what’s going on.”

Shilling, a Navy aerospace experimental psychologist, started working with Sesame Workshop early in 2007 to help develop the portion of “Talk, Listen, Connect” aimed at injured service members and to develop distribution and funding strategies. Shilling also helped devise the concept behind the development of an advanced Web site application to support the overall program.

“Coming Home” is the second installment of the series, which is designed to support military families with children between the ages of 2 and 5. The program features actress and singer Queen Latifah, singer John Mayer and the Muppet Elmo.

The special aired in connection with April’s designation as the “Month of the Military Child,” which is designed to salute the courage and strength of military families.

“Our service members and their families make sacrifices every day,” said Army Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton, M.D., the

director of DCoE. “Telling their stories honors military families, offers help to those who may not be coping well with change and educates our nation about military families.”

Appearing on the program was Dr. Stephen Cozza, professor of psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and associate director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, a DCoE component center.

“Sesame Workshop put together a wonderful program that really is geared toward families, using characters that are trusted in our communities and helps young children and adults understand the impact of these events on kids,” Cozza said.

To support the initiative, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences hosted a pre-screening of the Sesame Street special for military families, community support organizations and senior leaders of the Military Health System.

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## From the Director: Month of the Military Child



*Brig. Gen. Sutton, Director, Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury*

Is there anything more precious and more encouraging than the smile of a child? Every boy and girl is a promise for the future ... and the vessel of our hopes and dreams. Our children bring to us a joyful obligation, and in that spirit, April is the Month of the Military Child.

Warriors and their families form a transcendent bond, and children are the heart of the family. Even as we celebrate the joy and wonder that these little ones bring to our lives, we must also recognize

that children of military families may face unique obstacles. Sometimes it's the challenge of a parent being deployed. Sometimes it's the difficulty of having to move frequently from place to place. For some children, it is the adjustment of a parent facing a "new normal" after an injury, including issues of psychological health or traumatic brain injury.

In this Month of the Military Child, DCoE is spreading the word that the health and well-being of military children must be a priority for us all. We reach out to help them – even as we acknowledge their strength and resilience. Where would we be without the comfort of our children? We can never give back to them all the hope and joy they give to us, but we can celebrate and support them for their vital role in our lives.

This month has brought many and varied public "salutes" to military children, including kick-off ceremonies and special activities at schools, faith centers, community centers, military installations and elsewhere – and that's not all! Wherever you live and work, look for parades, arts-and-crafts events and special programs for the entire family ... all to show our communities that children matter to us in ways that we see every single day.

The Department of Defense, the military services and the Military Child Education Coalition have created workbooks and toolkits specifically targeted toward preparing and educating children about deployment and reintegration – and these tools are only part of the effort.

In addition, the Month of the Military Child brings the film tour of "BRATS: Our Journey Home," "Flags Across the Nation" and "Operation Military Kids." There is much more, and many of the events have been created to highlight local successes and to address specific local needs. Be sure to check for the listing of events within your community, provided by the National Military Family Association.

Someone once said that we worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he or she is someone today. It's so true! So let us love them and honor them and care for them not just in this special month, but all year round!

For the Children-

Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton, M.D.  
DCoE Director 

## DCoE Center Focus: The National Center for Telehealth and Technology



The National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2), a component center of DCoE, researches, develops, evaluates and deploys new and existing technologies for psychological health (PH) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

T2 meets this mission by serving as the principal Department of Defense coordinator in such areas as innovative technology applications, suicide surveillance and prevention, online behavioral health tools and telepsychological health.

T2 is dedicated to using the latest technology to provide innovative PH and TBI

treatment for warriors, veterans and their families.

The center's research and outreach programs support the following initiatives: creating virtual reality mental health applications; overseeing suicide surveillance/automation programs across the Department of Defense; providing an integrated Web presence; developing comprehensive screening programs for service members before, during and after deployments; developing automated tools and outcome measures for collecting and standardizing psychological health information; and providing telehealth and Web-based treatment for PH/TBI, including video teleconferences,

afterdeployment.org and interactive media.

Two technology projects that are a critical part of T2's mission are the Automated Behavioral Health Clinic and the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report. The automated clinic offers a standardized, automated check-in process for mental health clinics that treat service members or veterans. The suicide event report provides suicide surveillance for all branches of the military.

To learn more about T2, its programs and research, please visit <http://www.t2health.org/index.html>.

## DCoE Holds Open House on Capitol Hill

DCoE held an Open House in the Rayburn House Office Building to make members of Congress and their staffs more aware of its work.

DCoE Director Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton, M.D. spoke about DCoE's achievements and the importance of its mission at the March 31 event.

Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.) and members of her staff were among guests who attended the Open House. Other guests were staffers from the offices of

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.), Sen. Bernard Sanders (I-Vermont), Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-N.J.) and the House Armed Services Committee.

In addition, representatives from TRI-CARE Communications & Customer Service and the Veterans of Foreign Wars were among those in attendance.

To illustrate DCoE's progress, the event featured a timeline of DCoE accomplish-

ments and a slideshow featuring service members and their families in acts of resilience, recovery and reintegration.

Each of DCoE's six component centers had designated tables displaying brochures, handouts and additional information for members of the military and their families. In addition, each DCoE directorate and center provided an explanation of its mission and accomplishments.



## Brain Injury Awareness Day in Congress

In recognition of Brain Injury Awareness Month, DCoE participated in the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Awareness Fair on Capitol Hill that marked this year's Brain Injury Awareness Day.

The fair was sponsored by the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, which is co-chaired by Reps. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-N.J.) and Todd Russell Platts (R-Pa.).

The TBI Awareness Fair, held March 25, was designed to educate members of Congress, their staffs and the public on the prevalence of TBI.

The focus of this year's awareness fair was "Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries: From the Football Field to the Battlefield." Information on breakthroughs in TBI

research, development and technology was available.

An interactive display of exhibitors in the Rayburn House Office Building Foyer featured demonstrations from more than 45 exhibitors. There was also an interactive panel discussion on mild traumatic brain injuries and how they affect people. The discussion was moderated by Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Jaffee, M.D., director of the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, a DCoE component center.

Speakers included Lt. Gen. Clyde A. Vaughn, director of the Army National Guard; James Kelly, M.D., director of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence for Traumatic Brain Injury, a DCoE component center; and Chris Nowinski, author

and board member of the Brain Injury Association of America.

More than 40 federal, non-governmental, academic and complementary and alternative medicine organizations attended the fair, including the American Academy of Neurology; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Injury Response; the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, a DCoE component center; and the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Research and Development.

The event provided a forum for DCoE to form new partnerships with organizations such as the National Center for Injury Prevention & Control and George Washington University. 


## DCoE Designs Recognized by Astrid Awards

DCoE has won three Astrid Awards, which honor outstanding achievements in design communications.

DCoE won a silver award for its trade poster, a bronze award for its trade show

booth and a bronze award for its graphics and style guides.

MerComm, Inc. established the Astrid Awards in 1987 to encourage higher standards of quality in the communica-

tion arts and sciences internationally. MerComm receives entries for the Astrid Awards from more than 45 countries every year. 


## Sesame Workshop Salutes Strength of Military Families (Continued from page 1)

The screening was introduced by Dr. Charles Rice, president of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and included remarks from Dr. Robert Ursano, director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. Military Health System senior leaders in atten-

dance included Ellen Embrey, acting principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, and Sutton.

Sesame Workshop has been creating outreach materials to help military families since the first "Talk, Listen, Connect"

program aired in 2006.

For more information, visit Sesame Workshop's "Talk, Listen, Connect" Web site at <http://archive.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/>. 

## DCoE Staff Profile: Navy Cmdr. Russell Shilling



Cmdr. Shilling with Elmo and Rosita from the “Talk, Listen, Connect” program

Navy Cmdr. Russell Shilling, who is an aerospace experimental psychologist and scientific advisor for psychological health at DCoE, is an expert in the areas of experimental psychology, neuroscience, medical modeling and simulation, videogame technologies and hearing research.

Since DCoE began operating in November 2007, Shilling has helped direct funding into many traditional research areas as well as new research that evaluates the safety and efficacy of complementary and alternative medicine approaches.


At the Office of Naval Research, Shilling initiated a program in 2004 to develop a clinician’s tool for using virtual reality to supplement existing treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder. At the heart of the program was the desire to provide a validated tool for clinicians to use to help guide patients through the therapy process. Part of the program’s philosophy was that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to psychological health treatment.

“The experience with the virtual reality therapy program and experience fostering various initiatives to develop ‘serious games’ for health care has definitely influenced my view of developing innovative technologies for new applications in the psychological health arena,” Shilling said.

Building on his innovative work in the field of psychological health, Shilling helped create the award-winning “Talk, Listen, Connect” educational outreach program with Sesame Workshop. The

program, which premiered the second of three installments this month, uses Muppets and documentary footage to help children handle the multiple deployments of parents and cope with a parent’s physical and psychological injuries from combat.

“My thinking about family advocacy is also influenced by my two young children,” Shilling said. “Both are autistic; I spend a great deal of time thinking about how technology can be used to assist children with special needs as well as their parents – both inside and outside the military.”

“Outreach to military families is not only important to the family, but it is key to the overall health to the service member,” Shilling added. “At DCoE, we recognize that when the service member feels their family is healthy and happy, their overall psychological health is bolstered.” 

## TOOLS YOU CAN USE

More useful links are available at [www.dcoe.health.mil](http://www.dcoe.health.mil) under Resources

### Military Family Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://www.aap.org/sections/uniformedservices/deployment/index.html>)
- Military HOMEFRONT (<http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/>)
- Force Health, Protection and Readiness (<http://fhp.osd.mil/deploymentTips.jsp>)

### Reintegration Resources

- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ([http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/OEFOIF/OEF\\_OIF\\_Reintegration\\_Stress.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/OEFOIF/OEF_OIF_Reintegration_Stress.asp))
- Department of Labor (<http://www.dol.gov/vets/>)
- VA’s Vet Center (<http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>)

### Alcohol Awareness and Substance Abuse Treatment Resources

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/FAQs/General-English>)
- TRICARE (<http://www.tricare.mil/alcoholawareness/>)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/ph372/>)



DCoE In Action is a publication of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE). Please send us your comments on this newsletter and story ideas to [dcoemedia@tma.osd.mil](mailto:dcoemedia@tma.osd.mil). Our mailing address is 1401 Wilson Blvd., Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22209. Phone: (877) 291-3263.

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