

**Home Visitation:  
A Case Study of Evaluation at The David and Lucile  
Packard Foundation**

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The David and Lucile Packard Foundation employed an evaluation-focused strategy over more than a decade in a particular child development service area – the home visitation approach – that seems to have had a substantial impact on the field and illustrates several important issues in philanthropic use and practice of evaluation. While the Packard Foundation was in some ways uniquely suited to undertake an evaluation-focused strategy, the story of its involvement in home visitation unfolded one decision at a time – in a process not very different from the internal workings of other foundations and in organizational circumstances similar in many ways to those of other foundations. The Packard Foundation also confronted many of the issues that typically arise when foundations sponsor evaluation. This paper presents a case study of the Foundation’s evaluation-focused strategy.

## **The Beginnings: The Center for the Future of Children**

David Packard, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation until his death in 1996 and an engineer by training and profession, was personally steeped in scientific method and committed to the belief that public resources should be invested in programs on the basis of evidence. He extended this standard to the Foundation’s investments and was thus an enthusiastic supporter of the idea of starting a “think tank” within the foundation that would combine research and grantmaking in a multidisciplinary approach to issues affecting children, with the aim of influencing policy and practice. He was also personally concerned about the plight of children and wanted the Foundation to expand its activities on behalf of children and their families. Describing this new endeavor, he wrote:

Since its founding in 1964, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation has had a major interest in the health and well-being of children. Recently, I have come to believe that this country’s future is being seriously compromised by inadequate attention to the problems facing many of our children and their families. America is no longer the land of opportunity for many of our young people, because we have not been giving enough attention to the problems of their early childhood.<sup>1</sup>

Richard E. Behrman, M.D., a pediatrician and Dean of the Case Western Reserve University Medical School, joined the Foundation in 1989 to head the new entity, The Center for the Future of Children, which initiated and housed for many years the Foundation’s work in home visitation. The Center was established as a part of the Foundation, governed by the Foundation’s Board. Dr. Behrman’s vision of the Center for the Future of Children as a think tank was that the work of the staff, hired because they were considered experts in their fields and capable of analysis, would leverage the then relatively small amount of money available for grants.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the expectation was

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<sup>1</sup> From the foreword of the inaugural issue of *The Future of Children*, Volume 1, Number 1 (Spring 1991), published by The Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> At the founding of the Center, its annual budget was about \$2 million for grants and evaluations and had risen to \$5-6 million around the time the first major home visiting evaluation got under way, compared to about \$70 million for all of the Foundation’s children’s programs in 2001. The Foundation did not become one of the nation’s wealthiest until David Packard’s death, when its assets grew from \$ 2.3 billion to \$7.4

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that the staff would devote considerable time to reviewing, interpreting and synthesizing existing research in order to develop research-based grantmaking programs and in order to disseminate information about the “state-of-the-art.” Initially, this was a small group of people, including: an attorney, Carol Larson, who directed research and grantmaking in public policy (and who later became Vice President and Director of Foundation Programs); a Ph.D. in psychology, Deanna Gomby, who directed research and grantmaking in early childhood and who became the home visitation expert (and, ultimately, the interim director of the Foundation’s grantmaking for Children, Families, and Communities); an epidemiologist, Patricia Shiono, who supervised the Center’s research and grantmaking activities in the area of pregnancy and birth outcomes; and Eugene Lewit, a health economist, who directed research and grants in economics at the Center.

In the area of child development, the Center’s mission was to support efforts to “prepare children for school and for life” through the institutions of family and child care. Home visiting *was* the Center’s family strategy in child development.

The Center’s most visible activity was the publication of a journal called *The Future of Children*, initially put out three times a year and now published twice a year. There is no comparable periodic scholarly publication from a U.S. philanthropic organization. A Statement of Purpose printed inside the front cover of every issue begins in this way:

The primary purpose of *The Future of Children* is to disseminate timely information on major issues related to children’s well-being, with special emphasis on providing objective analysis and evaluation, translating existing knowledge into effective programs and policies, and promoting constructive institutional change. In attempting to achieve these objectives, we are targeting a multidisciplinary audience of national leaders, including policymakers, practitioners, legislators, executives, and professionals in the public and private sectors. This publication is intended to complement, not duplicate, the kind of technical analysis found in academic journals and the general coverage of children’s issues by the popular press and special interest groups.

The Center for the Future of Children was merged with the Foundation’s department of Community Programs in 1997 to form a department of Children, Families and Communities and Dr. Behrman is no longer a Foundation employee. But the journal remains a significant Foundation activity and Dr. Behrman continues as its editor-in-chief in a consultant capacity. The journal’s distribution is to 40,000 - 50,000 individuals per issue, including a program/policy core list of about two-thirds of the total with the remaining copies distributed on the basis of the topic. (There is no charge for the journal; it is free to anyone upon request and available at the website: [www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org).) A Foundation staff person serves as issue editor and conceptualizes each journal issue, commissions articles from outside experts, edits the manuscripts, drafts an overview and

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billion as a result of the Hewlett-Packard stock he bequeathed the Foundation. Its assets were valued at \$6.4 billion as of November 30, 2001.

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analysis, and is responsible for developing a dissemination plan for the journal issue. The cost to the Foundation of publishing *The Future of Children* is now about \$1 million per issue and it takes about 18 months to develop a single issue. (A sample of the issue topics from the early years of the journal appears in the box on the next page.)

The journal figures largely in the Foundation's strategy for investing in home visitation, in part because it was seen by the Center staff as a vehicle for disseminating what was known and being learned in this program area. But the journal also figures largely in the role that the Foundation played in the field of home visitation for child development because it carries weight. The journal is seen as a credible, objective source of information; it is widely distributed; and it is used and referred to across the range of people it targets (as listed in the Statement of Purpose above).<sup>3</sup> It stands alone because it is seen as an independent, scholarly publication, not as an extension of the Foundation's public affairs, communications, or media relations activities.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1999-2000, the Foundation commissioned an extensive external evaluation of the journal's impact as part of a strategic planning process for the journal. The evaluation involved a survey of 1,500 members of the journal's audience, including regular readers and non-readers, and focus groups of target audience members. The evaluator concluded that the journal is an asset to the Foundation, its audience sees it as credible, relevant, comprehensive and unique, and groups it with publications like *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

*The Future of Children*

**Drug-Exposed Infants**

Volume 1, Number 1 (Spring 1991)

**School-linked Services**

Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 1992)

**U.S. Health Care for Children**

Volume 2, Number 2 (Winter 1992)

**Adoption**

Volume 3, Number 1 (Spring 1993)

**Health Care Reform**

Volume 3, Number 2 (Summer/Fall 1993)

**Home Visiting**

Volume 3, Number 3 (Winter 1993)

**Children and Divorce**

Volume 4, Number 1 (Spring 1994)

**Sexual Abuse of Children**

Volume 4, Number 2 (Summer/Fall 1994)

**Critical Health Issues for Children and Youths**

Volume 4, Number 3 (Winter 1994)

**Low Birth Weight**

Volume 5, Number 1 (Spring 1995)

**Critical Issues for Children and Youths**

Volume 5, Number 2 (Summer/Fall 1995)

**Long Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs**

Volume 5, Number 3 (Winter 1995)

**Special Education for Students with Disabilities**

Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 1996)

**Financing Child Care**

Volume 6, Number 2 (Summer/Fall 1996)

## **The Beginnings: Parents as Teachers**

The Packard Foundation first got involved with home visitation because of a specific grant request in 1987 (before the Center for the Future of Children had been established) from within the local four-county area in Northern California where the Foundation targeted its support for direct services programs for children. The request was from a group of school districts in the Salinas Valley of Monterey County to adapt and implement a child development model called Parents as Teachers. Parents as Teachers (PAT) had been created in Missouri and adopted in all of the state's school districts as a universal (i.e., not targeted) approach to maximizing children's school readiness by providing education to parents about effective interaction with their children for learning and developmental screening for children in the first three years of life. In Monterey County, PAT was also planned as a parent education extension of school services and available to all within the community, but that would result in a different service population because new parents in the Salinas Valley were predominantly low-income and Hispanic. The Foundation provided a planning grant to the school district applicant group.

The grant request from the school district group came at a time when there was an increasing amount of interest in the "Zero to Three" age group and an increasing amount of funding for family support programs, early intervention programs to prevent child abuse and neglect and developmental delays among children in high-risk groups, and programs to enhance school readiness. "Home visiting" crosscut this broad range of child development activity. Home visiting was a service delivery strategy that had been employed in health and social service programs for hundreds of years. In the 1980's, home visiting was at the core of a number of child development program models besides Parents as Teachers. Among these others were HIPPI (the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) for children age three through five, which was promoted by Hillary Rodham Clinton when she was the First Lady of Arkansas, the Healthy Start Program developed in Hawaii, the Nurse Home Visitation model first tested in a rural area of New York, and two programs funded by the federal government – Even Start and the Comprehensive Child Development Program. There was a broad public policy trend supporting programming in this direction, stimulated in part by brain development research that highlighted the lasting effects of early childhood experiences.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect issued two reports on the state of the field in the early 1990's that specifically called for the development of a universal system of home visitation services for new parents as the cornerstone of the nation's efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a review of the evolution of public policy related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, see Deborah Daro and Anne Cohn Donnelly, "Charting the Waves of Prevention: Two Steps Forward and One Step Back," The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago (undated – for availability, e-mail to: [daro-deborah@chmail.spc.uchicago.edu](mailto:daro-deborah@chmail.spc.uchicago.edu).)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect. *Child Abuse and Neglect: Critical First Steps in Response to a National Emergency*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990, and *Creating Caring Communities: Blueprint for an Effective Federal Policy for Child Abuse and Neglect*, 1991.

By the time the Monterey County PAT group completed its planning and returned to the Foundation to request implementation funding, the Center for the Future of Children was operating. The Center staff decided to fund a demonstration project that would include both services and evaluation of the Parents as Teachers model, in part because Dick Behrman was curious about the claims made for the program. “We looked into what they were claiming in the grant request – it seemed too good to be true,” he said. While Dr. Behrman and the Center staff believed that there was promise for the services, they judged the evaluation evidence available from Missouri’s PAT program to have methodological weaknesses. This decision, which also reflected the Foundation’s commitment to the local area and to child development, was the beginning of a sustained involvement by the Foundation – primarily by Deanna Gomby – in learning about and disseminating information about the home visiting strategy for improving child development outcomes.

### **Developing an Evaluation-Based Strategy**

The desire to understand more fully and accurately the impact of home visiting underlay the Foundation’s decision to tie program funding for Parents as Teachers (PAT) to evaluation and, specifically, to a randomized trial. The PAT program in Missouri had been studied by an independent evaluator using a quasi-experimental design with positive results for a random sample of 75 families who participated in a pilot project in four school districts and who were compared to a group of 69 families recruited later and matched to the PAT group on the basis of their characteristics. The grant to implement PAT in the Salinas Valley of Monterey County was conditioned on the grantee’s willingness to participate in an evaluation that would also be independent but would involve a “true experiment,” a randomized trial. There were two reasons for this condition: (1) Additional evaluation was considered necessary because the population studied in the Missouri PAT evaluation was predominantly white and middle class, so there was a question about whether the approach would work with a predominantly low-income, Hispanic population. (2) The Center staff at the Foundation were skeptical about the quasi-experimental findings from Missouri.<sup>6</sup> The Salinas Valley PAT program administrators readily agreed to the evaluation condition because they believed that they had an effective service model and the evaluation results would reflect this.

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<sup>6</sup> In the program evaluation field, experiments in which a single program-eligible group is recruited and then randomly assigned either to a participant or non-participant group are considered methodologically superior to quasi-experimental designs because, if properly executed, these “true” experiments eliminate selection bias as an explanation for different outcomes of the participant and non-participant groups. In a well-designed and -executed random assignment study, the only explanation for different outcomes of the people who were assigned to the participant group and those who were assigned to a non-participant (or control) group is what the program under study provided. This turns out to be a major issue in home visiting programs (and in many other social service programs) because the attrition rates are so large that “graduates” of the programs are often different from the people who dropped out along the way, and most quasi-experimental studies, including the one that had been completed on the Missouri PAT program, do not capture those differences.

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The Center staff – Deanna Gomby and Pat Shiono -- prepared a Request for Proposals to solicit an independent evaluator for the Salinas Valley PAT project, received several proposals in response, and in conjunction with Salinas Valley PAT staff, ultimately selected SRI International, because of their proposed strategy and experience and also because the Salinas Valley school district group believed that the SRI group would be easy to work with. A 100-family pilot test with a random assignment evaluation got under way in 1990 with a significant commitment to development work by the three partners – the school districts, the evaluator, and the Foundation. The active role in grants and evaluations envisioned by Dick Behrman for Center staff – described by Deanna Gomby as similar to being, simultaneously, a Principal Investigator on a research project and a project officer in an operating foundation – is exemplified by Dr. Gomby’s participation, with the SRI evaluators, in the PAT home visitor training. The purpose of this was to inform the design of the evaluation for a full test of PAT in the Salinas Valley. Dr. Gomby was also actively involved with the evaluators in developing new measures for child outcomes for the full test of PAT and determining how attrition of the PAT enrollees might affect the proposed experiment.

### **Widening an Evaluation-Based Strategy**

While the pilot test of PAT was under way in the Salinas Valley site, the State of California became interested in the PAT program model as a strategy for helping teenage mothers with their parenting skills and improving the development outcomes of their children. The state officials approached the Packard Foundation about a collaboration and this resulted in the addition of another PAT evaluation to Dr. Gomby’s portfolio. In cooperation with the California-based Stuart Foundations, The Center for the Future of Children funded the evaluation of four Teen Parents as Teachers program sites -- again by SRI International, at Dr. Gomby’s insistence to ensure consistency. (The demonstration programs, all located in Southern California, were funded by the Office of Child Abuse Prevention of the California Department of Social Services and the California Department of Health Services’ Maternal and Child Health Branch.)

The Center for the Future of Children also collaborated with the Stuart Foundations to study a PAT program that Stuart had funded in San Diego County (in National City), commissioning SRI in 1991 to undertake a retrospective quasi-experimental evaluation of the program, which was already producing “graduates” as the evaluation began. An *ex post* untreated control group was recruited for comparison purposes and SRI’s analysis showed that there were “consistent and strong beneficial effects from PAT participation on virtually all measures included in the evaluation... Clearly PAT is an effective intervention for improving parenting knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors and for supporting positive child development.”<sup>7</sup>

At the conclusion in 1992 of the pilot test of PAT in Salinas Valley, the results reported by SRI were promising enough for the Center and Foundation to go forward with a full-scale program and random assignment evaluation. According to SRI,

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Wagner. *Evaluation of the National City Parents As Teachers Program*, Menlo Park, California: SRI International, February 1993, p. 3.



The intent of the pilot evaluation of the Northern California [Salinas Valley, Monterey County] Parents as Teachers project was to learn whether and how a rigorous evaluation of the PAT model of parenting education, implemented with at-risk families, could be done, as well as whether such an evaluation might demonstrate positive outcomes attributable to PAT participation. On both counts, we are encouraged by the pilot evaluation experience.<sup>8</sup>

So, by the end of 1992, the Center was committed to funding both the PAT program in the Salinas Valley and the SRI evaluation of that program,<sup>9</sup> and the SRI evaluations of the four-site Teen PAT demonstration in Southern California and of the National City PAT site program. This was a substantial investment in one model of home visiting for child development. But the Center staff were thinking more broadly about how to make a research-based contribution to the home visiting field. As a further step to advance learning, Deanna Gomby and Carol Larson began putting together Volume 3, Number 3 of *The Future of Children*, which provided a review of knowledge about home visiting at that point.

### **Interpretation of Research: The Center Takes a Position on Home Visiting**

*The Future of Children* issue on Home Visiting published in Winter 1993 illustrates one difficulty inherent in a research-based strategy of influencing policy and practice: With the complexity of social science methods comes the need to make sense of research findings for non-research audiences. The format of the journal is explicitly designed to take on the editorial task of interpretation and to go beyond interpretation to make recommendations to policy and practice audiences based on the evidence presented. Every journal issue begins with an Introduction explaining why the topic was chosen and what the issue contains, followed by a section called Analysis and Recommendations, which is prepared by the Foundation staff. It is in the process of preparing this section of the journal that internal debate occasionally takes place and it is in this section of the journal that the Foundation takes a position on what the evidence means and what should be done about it.

Dr. Behrman's Introduction to the Winter 1993 issue began:

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Wagner and Mary McElroy. *Home, the First Classroom: A Pilot Evaluation of the Northern California Parents As Teachers Project*, Menlo Park, California: SRI International, December 1992, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Grants for each activity were made annually because the Center's budget was not large enough to "forward fund" both the program and evaluation for the expected duration of their operation. Altogether, the Monterey County PAT program received about \$1.7 million from the Packard Foundation between 1989 and 1997 and SRI International received about \$950,000 for the Monterey County PAT evaluation. Three other California foundations provided funding to the program in Monterey County as well: The Community Foundation for Monterey County, the S. H. Cowell Foundation, and the Harden Foundation. The Ford Foundation provided funding to SRI for a qualitative study of home visiting to supplement the Salinas Valley PAT evaluation.

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We chose the topic of home visiting programs for pregnant women and families with newborns for several reasons. Although home visiting is certainly not a new program idea, there has been increasing enthusiasm for it in recent years, with large initiatives being launched or recommended at the federal level and in many states. In addition, it is a service model which has been evaluated extensively. We believed it was timely to develop a publication which would describe the existing programs and lessons learned from the research, as well as present perspectives about future directions from some of the leading analysts of early intervention programs. (p. 4)

In this issue of the journal, the staff – at that time, the staff of the Center for the Future of Children -- invited contributions from scholars who had studied home visiting programs in the U.S. and in Europe, including one team who reviewed the results of 31 randomized trials of home visiting programs that focused on preventing preterm delivery and low birth weight; improving outcomes of infants born preterm or with low birth weight; or serving families at risk for child maltreatment. Several of the contributors read the research evidence on home visiting for this population as “promising” and the Center staff, in the Analysis and Recommendations section, concluded this as well. They said:

We believe that research findings are promising enough to recommend that the use of home visiting should be further expanded and the evaluation of home visiting should be continued. (p.7)<sup>10</sup>

This conclusion established the need, from the perspective of the Center staff, to return to the subject of home visiting in the journal when subsequent evaluation results proved not so promising, and their final recommendation – that “expectations should be realistic” – foreshadowed that turnaround. Expanding on the recommendation, they said:

Clearly, home visiting has never been and will never be a magic cure. Instead, home visiting can serve as the valuable front end of a service delivery system for families no matter their economic situation. If only a few visits are offered to families, those visits can serve as an outreach mechanism for health, education and welfare systems. If multiple visits are delivered carefully and over time with well-trained staff, home visiting can yield some important but modest benefits for children’s health and development. The word “modest” is key. There have been no studies of any program that relied solely on home visiting which have yielded large and/or long-term benefits for parents or children. (p. 18)

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<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Government Accounting Office reached a similar conclusion three years earlier in a Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, entitled *Home visiting: A promising intervention strategy for at-risk families*. GAO/HRD-90-83. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1990. As noted above, similar recommendations had been put forward by the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1990 and 1991.

The authors of the Analysis and Recommendations section<sup>11</sup> noted that “there are very good randomized trials currently under way, or soon to be under way, of significant program models...”

## **Widening an Evaluation-Based Strategy Further**

By 1993, an evaluation-based knowledge-building process had begun in home visiting that integrated research, grantmaking and dissemination: Evaluation results led to dissemination (and supplementary analysis) via the journal, which prompted further investments by the Foundation in evaluation and analysis, which led once again to dissemination and analysis via the journal, followed by additional investments. Specifically, the 1993 issue of *The Future of Children* on home visiting was followed by additional grants by the Center for evaluation, analysis and discussion while the randomized trials mentioned in the journal began to yield findings. Both the additional grant activity and the randomized trials (some funded by Packard and some by others) provided content for a 1999 journal issue entitled “Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations.” This journal issue, in turn, spawned a final round of grants to the major nationally adopted home visiting program models for practice improvement, based on the evaluation and other research findings.<sup>12</sup>

This orderly evolution of a knowledge-building and field-building strategy is a frame for events and decisions that did not necessarily seem so systematic and forward-looking at the time. On one hand, Deanna Gomby reported that the Center “did not set out to make a big splash. Home visiting was a very circumscribed investment. It was the parent education strategy in an \$800,000 child development portfolio that also included child care investments and a research synthesis of early childhood education evaluations.”<sup>13</sup> She also said that “every phase was going to be the last phase, but there were natural steps to take next.” On the other hand, one of the members of the editorial advisory board of *The Future of Children* journal, Heather Weiss,<sup>14</sup> described what Dr. Gomby was doing in this way: “She was always looking at how we position evidence to stimulate conversation.” Mary Wagner, the SRI principal investigator for the PAT evaluations, described the deliberation of Packard Foundation’s involvement in home visiting:

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<sup>11</sup> These were Deanna Gomby, Carol Larson, Eugene Lewit, and Richard Behrman.

<sup>12</sup> This integrated approach may have been uniquely possible for the Packard Foundation because of two features of the structure of the Center for the Future of Children: (1) Decisions about the content of *The Center for the Future of Children* journal issues were “staff level.” (2) Program and evaluation staff were the same people and they controlled all of the program and evaluation funds as well as dissemination activity.

<sup>13</sup> This synthesis was published in the Winter 1995 issue of *The Future of Children* (Volume 5, Number 3) for which Deanna Gomby served as issue editor with Mary Lerner, a Ph.D. in Human Development who served as the first policy analyst/editor at the Center dedicated to working on the journal without grantmaking responsibilities.

<sup>14</sup> Weiss is the Director of the Harvard (University) Family Research Project at the university’s Graduate School of Education.

Take a step, assess where you are, keep taking the next step...It's not a grand plan, but sustained intentionality. They kept on a course, saying "What's the next step?" and determined to do it.

The purposes and planfulness of the Center staff became issues later because their interpretation of the research evidence in 1998-1999 was not welcomed by many people in the field.

In the years between the two *Future of Children* journal issues on home visiting – the only topic that has been reviewed in two journal issues -- the Foundation's Board approved grants to analyze previously collected evaluation data for HIPPI and to co-fund an evaluation of Hawaii's Healthy Start model. There was also a grant in 1993 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to hold a conference on home visiting to disseminate and discuss the subject of the first journal issue on home visiting, and grants in 1994 to the national Parents as Teachers organization to develop a research agenda for the program and to the University of North Carolina to enable one of the experts in staffing issues of home visiting programs<sup>15</sup> to plan a center for training home visitors. There were 1995 and 1997 grants to the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences to supplement the PAT evaluation work with a cost analysis, and a 1996 grant to study the feasibility of replicating the Nurse Home Visitation Program, as well as annual grants to the Monterey County PAT program and to SRI for evaluation of PAT. In addition, SRI was asked to follow-up on the "graduates" of the Salinas Valley PAT program at age four to compare their school readiness with a national sample of Hispanic children. Although little was made of the finding that the Salinas Valley children were markedly less school ready than the national sample -- mainly because only half the PAT group could be re-assessed – the research was a further widening of the Foundation's knowledge-building strategy.

### **Changes at the Foundation**

Until David Packard's death in 1996, the Center operated with significant freedom and autonomy. The Center presented projects to the Board of Trustees and there was a Board subcommittee that provided oversight to the Center and approved all grants, but great deference was given to Dr. Behrman and his staff to follow their professional instincts and to exploit opportunities. As Deanna Gomby described the progression of investments in home visiting, "We didn't plan to start with a demonstration and then mount an evaluation, but sometimes fortuitous things happen and the Center had the flexibility to go where the evaluations led."

One of the reasons for this flexibility is that "the Center was something new within the culture of the Foundation, especially having someone in the Foundation of the

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<sup>15</sup> This was Barbara Hanna Wasik, one of the contributors to the 1993 issue of *The Future of Children* journal, who was also the author, with Donna M Bryant, of a book, *Home Visiting: Procedures for Helping Families*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001 (second edition). (First edition published in 1990.)

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stature of Dick Behrman,” according to Carol Larson. Prior to 1989, the Foundation’s grantmaking in the children’s arena was primarily local and consonant with Lucile Packard’s interests.<sup>16</sup> Ms. Larson added that in 1989, the Foundation “had only limited experience with national research and policy work and using evaluation to improve the field. The Center was the beginning of a greater commitment by the Foundation to more rigorous and consistent use of evaluation.” Packard was, at that point, a relatively small family foundation, directed by family members, investing in areas of interest to them. What distinguished Packard from many other family foundations was the familiarity of the family members with scientific methods and the business orientation from the Hewlett-Packard Company culture to continuous improvement.

David Packard’s death in March 1996 started a process at the Foundation that in some ways affirmed the evaluation-based strategy of the home visiting work and in other ways, changed the organizational circumstances that had enabled it to flourish. After his death, the Board revisited and articulated anew a set of values that the Packard family brought to the Foundation’s work. These values now hold a prominent place in the Foundation’s literature. They are: integrity, respect for all people, a belief in individual leadership, a commitment to effectiveness, and the capacity to think big.<sup>17</sup> According to Carol Larson, the “commitment to effectiveness” was first explicitly articulated as a core value of the Foundation in 1996 as the Board initiated a planning process to expand its grantmaking. The value is stated in this way: “The Board and staff will identify unique and strategic opportunities to make a difference. They will evaluate their effectiveness and change strategies as necessary to achieve greater effectiveness. The foundation will take a long-term view and keep a commitment to selected areas that require this.”

The Packard Foundation’s consideration of how to enact a commitment to effectiveness did not move quickly, however, because David Packard’s death necessitated a rapid growth in capacity in order to absorb and expend the Foundation’s new assets. Addressing the internal function of evaluation was “backburnered,” according to Ms. Larson, and the Foundation hired its first director of evaluation in June of 2001. However, despite lacking staff dedicated to evaluation, several of the Foundation’s programs developed evaluation and monitoring plans as part of their strategic planning “with the notion that we are trying to be about learning, rather than just about accountability.” This comment from Carol Larson reflects her analysis of how the Packard Foundation’s introduction of evaluation (beyond the work done by the Center for the Future of Children) is different from some other foundations’ approaches to evaluation.

We have positioned evaluation in the Foundation to emphasize the goals of learning and increasing effectiveness – both for staff and grantees. The Foundation has a long history, stemming from Lucile Packard’s example, of being respectful of grantees’ leadership and work, and bringing a sense of affirmation

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<sup>16</sup> Lucile Packard died in 1987.

<sup>17</sup> From the Introduction of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation Program Overview 2001 (p. 3) at [www.packfound.org](http://www.packfound.org).

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and welcoming to grantmaking. Evaluation can be threatening to grantees and to staff alike. But it can also be a helpful tool for learning and improvement. Structurally, it has been difficult in some foundations when the evaluation function reported directly to the Board or to the CEO, and it has appeared to staff and grantees that accountability is emphasized more than the goal of learning. In positioning our evaluation function in a collegial peer relationship with program directors, we are trying to build a team that is committed to learning and mutual stewardship of funds.

Ms. Larson credited the Center for the Future of Children with “leading the way in evaluation of our own programs,” and noted that “the evaluation-public policy connection was uniquely housed in the Foundation’s children’s programs,” and that “evaluation was more emphasized in the Center because of Dick Behrman’s leadership.” After David Packard’s death, however, the unique position of the Center in the Foundation did not last and with the changes there was some accompanying staff turnover. The Center was merged with a department that reported to Ms. Larson, Dr. Behrman left, the publication of *The Future of Children* journal was separated from the grantmaking functions in the Department of Children, Families and Communities (CFC), a director of that department was hired and departed, and a new foundation-wide evaluation function was created, also reporting to Ms. Larson. In 2001, Deanna Gomby left the Foundation as well, probably marking the end of the Foundation’s focused work in home visiting.

Major change was the key theme of the Foundation’s organizational development between 1996 and 2001. The Foundation was engaged in managing a rapid expansion while revisiting its purposes, restructuring, and replacing its leadership. (Colburn Wilbur, Executive Director from 1976, retired in 1999 and joined the Foundation’s Board.) Because of these organization-wide challenges, and because of the relatively small scale of home visiting activity – 50 grants totaling less than \$8 million from 1989 through 2001 – the content of the home visiting portfolio and its consequences were discussed in a significant way with the full Board only a few times. According to the CFC staff, it was “beneath the radar screen” of the Foundation Board unless the staff felt the need to bring it up for special attention. In the midst of change, Deanna Gomby kept to her course. Mary Wagner of SRI also noted that as Dr. Gomby rose within the Foundation – to eventually become the interim director of the Children, Families and Communities department – she appeared to be more able to make decisions independently.

### **An Interpretation Example: How Much Bad News, How Much Good News?**

As findings from PAT, Hawaii Healthy Start, HIPPI, the Comprehensive Child Development Program and other home visiting experiments were coming in during the 1996-1998 period, a pattern was developing of mixed or no significant effects. Results from the Teen PAT were among the first. This evaluation had tested the standard PAT model, stand-alone case management, and a combination of PAT and case management compared to no services. A dropout rate of 57 percent and a lower than expected average

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intensity of service complicated the analysis. The bottom line was small positive effects on a few measures of child development and parenting outcomes for participants who received the expected intensity of service, but very few effects for the overall enrollee groups.

At this early point in the cumulation of home visiting findings from the experimental tests of the 1990's, the SRI evaluators saw these results as a "glass half full." The Executive Summary of the Teen PAT evaluation report concludes:

These findings demonstrate that not all TPAT interventions were equally effective in achieving positive outcomes for teen parents and their children, and some outcomes did not seem amenable to any influence at all in the time frame of this demonstration. Yet the importance of the gains that were achieved should not be understated. For example, the combined intervention, *delivered at its expected level of intensity* [emphasis added], was associated with a 27 percent reduction in the rate at which participants were pregnant again before their children's second birthdays, holding constant a variety of other differences between them. Given the high social and personal costs of rapid repeat childbearing by adolescent parents, this finding should give heart to those committed to reducing welfare costs attributable to families that began when mothers were teens; reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect that are associated with mothers who became parents when they lacked emotional maturity and life stability to parent effectively; and ameliorating the negative consequences of having young women who do not complete even a high school education and, therefore, cannot support their children financially or contribute to the nation's economic welfare. No intervention can eliminate these problems. Any intervention that can make a sizable dent in them is worth further consideration by policy-makers, practitioners, and funders.<sup>18</sup>

When the SRI final report on the Salinas Valley PAT experiment was published three and one-half years later, after findings from randomized trials of other home visiting models were available and summarized, with cautions about future investments, in the 1999 issue of *The Future of Children* on home visiting, the interpretation of mixed results was more reserved:

In sum, the Northern California Parents as Teachers demonstration has documented modest benefits to enrolled children in some developmental domains, and limited benefits to some subgroups of parents from participating in the PAT model of home visiting, as implemented in the demonstration. Besides giving this cautious support to the program in general, the demonstration has addressed directly the questions of whether PAT is effective for Latino families...The

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Wagner, Renee Cameto and Suzanne Gerlach-Downie. *Intervention in Support of Adolescent Parents and Their Children: A Final Report on the Teen Parents As Teachers Demonstration*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, March 1996, pp. S-8-9.

demonstration findings suggest that, as implemented in this setting, the program was beneficial for families with Latina mothers.<sup>19</sup>

The upbeat tone of the Teen PAT findings compared to the more neutral tone of the Salinas Valley Pat results highlights the interpretation problem that the CFC staff and journal editors confronted in developing the Analysis and Recommendations section of the 1999 journal issue: What is the right combination of good news and bad news when results are mixed? These two SRI evaluation summaries highlight another interpretation issue that generated a division between researchers and advocates for programs: What conclusions should be drawn about experiments in which the experimental group, on average, did not receive the expected level of service? Another version of this question is: What are valid methods in the search for positive effects when the average differences between experimental and control groups show either negative effects or no effects?

### **Methods and Standards of Evidence: The Stew of Disagreement**

In the summer of 1998, the Foundation brought together a group of evaluators and program directors for the home visiting models, as well as a few independent experts, to review the findings available at that point, in anticipation of publishing an issue of *The Future of Children* journal on the evaluation results the following year. (A “rotation opening” for the journal was unfilled, so this issue was developed more quickly than most.) Ann Segal, a senior official in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, was invited as well to provide a policy perspective on what was being found. Mark Appelbaum, a psychologist based at the University of California at San Diego was invited because the Foundation had engaged him, with his co-author Monica Sweet, to conduct a “meta-analysis” of the evaluation work in home visiting to supplement the findings emerging from the major home visiting models that would be reported on in the second journal issue.<sup>20</sup>

The discussion at this meeting highlighted a core controversy in the practice of program evaluation – a controversy that tends to divide evaluators and program operators, but also divides evaluators who primarily employ quantitative methods from those who primarily employ qualitative methods and evaluators who use experimental designs from those who use quasi-experimental designs. What are appropriate standards of evidence? is the question at the center of this controversy. Often, but not always, the question arises in the context of a purpose: Evidence for what? – investing small or large amounts of money in programs? public or private money? learning about program practice? choosing among program models? doing something when nothing has been shown to work?

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Wagner, Serena Clayton, Suzanne Gerlach-Downie and Mary McElroy. *An Evaluation of the Northern California Parents As Teachers Demonstration*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, September 1999, p. 9-8.

<sup>20</sup> These models were: the Nurse Home Visitation Program; Hawaii’s Healthy Start Program; Parents as Teachers; The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI); the Comprehensive Child Development Program; and the Healthy Families America program.



Deborah Daro of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, who analyzed the evaluation results of the Healthy Families America model for the 1999 journal issue, cast the meeting as a turning point in the understanding of many who attended about what was going on in the field. “The assumptions had been that there was lots of positive stuff happening.” At this meeting, “the tenor changed from ‘Here’s a body of research that is giving us some guidance [in practice]’ to ‘Here’s a body of research that shows that none of this works.’” According Dr. Daro, the negative assessment was the result of a criterion for evidence proposed at the meeting by the Foundation staff, whose view was that only main effects of randomized trials should qualify as findings for purpose of publication in *The Future of Children*. This implied that reporting positive effects for subgroups within the context of overall negative effects in a randomized trial was questionable,<sup>21</sup> and qualitative evidence or quasi-experimental evidence was definitely less than ideal.

This proposed standard of evidence – main effects of randomized trials only – had implications for how almost all of the home visiting models might be characterized. The Nurse Home Visitation Model, for example, had been evaluated most rigorously and comprehensively over the longest period of time but showed positive effects concentrated in the higher-risk subgroups, with some exceptions, providing “little benefit for the broader population.”<sup>22</sup> By the standard of “main effects of randomized trials only,” this model was on the par with others that only had positive results from quasi-experimental evaluations. Parents as Teachers was somewhere in the middle of the home visitation models, evidence-wise, with six independent quasi-experimental evaluations (including the National City study by SRI International) and one pre-test/post-test study, all showing positive child outcome results on most measures, but also the Packard-funded randomized trial evaluations showing very limited impacts in. In the end, the studies reviewed in the 1999 issue of *The Future of Children* included a range of research designs. The Analysis and Recommendations section of the 1999 journal issue, as it was eventually written, did report subgroup findings from experimental evaluations and included patterns emerging from the non-experimental research. Deanna Gomby’s concern about the body of the research, reflected in the section, was that

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<sup>21</sup> The perspective of some methodologists is that subgroup analysis within a randomized experiment is legitimate only if the research sample was stratified to ensure statistical significance of subgroup differences and the subgroup analysis was specified at the design stage of the experiment. Others argue that this is unnecessary if sample sizes are large because both the similarity of the experimental and control subgroup characteristics and the statistical significance of differences between them can be tested – although subgroups must be defined according to baseline characteristics, not according to in-program or post-program behaviors or outcomes.

<sup>22</sup> David L. Olds, Charles R. Henderson, Jr., Harriet J. Kitzman, John J. Eckenrode, Robert E. Cole and Robert C. Tatelbaum. “Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses: Recent Findings,” *The Future of Children*, Volume 9, Number 1 (Spring/Summer 1999), Los Altos, CA: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, p. 44.

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There were not a lot of consistencies across the models, or even within models, about which subgroups benefit most. That's what led to the reluctance to say, on the basis of a single study, that the subgroup analyses should be heeded.

Another key concern, from the Foundation staff's perspective, was that the results from the randomized trials were consistently less positive than the results from the quasi-experimental studies – suggesting that that the comparison groups used for the quasi-experimental studies were not truly comparable.

The summer 1998 meeting group backed away from the logical next step when the question was raised: “Are we prepared to say that there is no evidence that early intervention, via home visiting, with pregnant and parenting teenagers is effective?” However, the issue of standards of evidence would come up again at the next major discussion of the Foundation's interpretation of evaluation results. At the summer 1998 meeting, in offering the policy perspective, Ann Segal agreed with the “no evidence” evaluation findings, but emphasized lessons for the programs:

Most home visiting programs promised to do everything – get mothers working, reduce child abuse and neglect, increase literacy, and more. A common sense reading is that these programs aren't going to get you where you want to go. I take away that the evaluation answer is right – there's nothing there. *But*, these programs shouldn't be out there by themselves. You have to hook them onto something stronger.

These were also the conclusions of the Foundation staff, as presented in the 1999 issue of *The Future of Children*, and as expressed by some of the program directors later – but not before more contentiousness about what the Foundation proposed to publish in the journal.

### **Managing the News of Disappointing Results**

When it became clear that home visiting evaluations were not providing strong support for the approach – whatever the standard of evidence used – the Foundation adopted a strategy that Deanna Gomby described as “early, limited, progressive leaking to prepare the policy audience and the service field.” The summer 1998 meeting was the first forum. This was followed by a much larger meeting in early March of 1999 in Washington, D.C., funded by the Packard Foundation, hosted by the National Research Council and organized by Deborah Phillips, who was then director of the Council's Board on Children, Youth and Families as well as an advisor to the Foundation for the 1999 journal issue. In between these meetings, drafts of the journal articles were shared with policy and program people, researchers and foundation people “to let everyone know what was being found and to discuss themes of analysis,” according to Dr. Gomby. The Washington-based research organization Zero to Three organized a series of briefings of key federal policymakers as well.

In this informal dissemination process, the issue editors – Deanna Gomby and Patti Culross, a public health specialist and medical doctor in the Foundation's Children,

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Families and Communities department – “received a lot of advice from inside and outside the Foundation, ranging from ‘don’t release the findings because of the damage that will result to the field’ to ‘hold a press conference and tell the world that nothing works.’” Dr. Gomby noted that there was “some consternation” among the staff planning the issue. However, there was never a serious consideration of not publishing the findings. In part, the commitment to publish was rooted in the original purposes of the Center for the Future of Children and the ongoing purpose of *The Future of Children* journal to make objective information available for policy and practice. According to Dr. Gomby, the Foundation staff “believed that *either* positive or negative results from evaluations of the national home visiting models would benefit the services,” but they “initially hoped to find something good for children and families rather than become the messenger of bad news.” In part, the commitment to publish the specific home visiting evaluation findings was taken as a moral obligation, or at least a professional responsibility, by the Foundation staff who had labeled the home visiting approach as “promising” in 1993.

In early March, 1999, a group of more than 200 people gathered in Washington, D.C., for a two-day discussion of what the evaluations were showing and what the Packard Foundation was planning to publish. Originally intended as an “invitation only” meeting, the National Research Council ended up with a larger-than-expected group. The meeting “got lots of play,” according to Deborah Daro, because “people in the field expected policy to be made” as a result. The purpose of the Foundation staff in providing funding to the NRC for this event was to select a “dispassionate venue” for the formal release of the research review that would be published in *The Future of Children* journal.

The meeting was anything but dispassionate. “Quite fiery” was Deanna Gomby’s description. Heather Weiss, the keynote speaker, who had been involved in the 1970’s in evaluating the home visiting program that became the model for the current generation of these programs, portrayed the field as having grown up by models without an infrastructure to have “cross-model conversation.” She described it as a field in need of infrastructure to “take the message [of the evaluations] and strengthen the models.” But there were more fundamental questions at play: Once again, what is an appropriate standard of evidence to shape policy? What is the role of qualitative evidence? – “the stories participants and providers tell us in response to structured interviews, well-developed single case studies and in response to well-developed theories of change models,” as Deborah Daro characterized this type of evidence. Which models had “science on their side” and which ones did not? Was the publication of the evaluation findings, as proposed by the Foundation, “a disservice to the field?” Was Dr. Gomby herself, or the Foundation, bent on killing off the home visiting service approach?

Deanna Gomby reported that while the criticism of the Foundation’s purposes from some of the meeting participants was difficult, “by the end of the meeting, a consensus was emerging that the results were indeed mixed” and that the potential reasons related to the variability of the quality of service and that the program leaders should focus on implementation. This was the basic message of the Analysis and

Recommendations section of the 1999 issue on home visiting of *The Future of Children*.<sup>23</sup>

## **Interpretation: The Foundation Takes Another Position on Home Visiting**

There was little disagreement within the Foundation about the findings from the evaluations of home visiting models. The Foundation staff were inclined by their disciplinary perspectives to credit the results of randomized trials as providing the strongest evidence about effectiveness and to seek the effectiveness “bottom line” for policy development. But there was also a Foundation interest in practice and the tradition of respectfulness toward the non-profit organizations trying to help people. As Dick Behrman described the internal discussion about how to cast the findings,

The staff didn’t want to cut the ground from underneath the advocates. They couldn’t show positive impacts but hoped to show what things made programs more effective – tried to educate. The policy consideration was that “we don’t want to have resources for something that doesn’t work.” There was an internal struggle about the Recommendations section, which was always the journal problem.

In Dr. Behrman’s view, the 1999 issue gave the most positive version possible of the findings on home visiting. He would have interpreted the evidence more negatively. The prevailing view – the issue editors’ – was that the task of interpretation required for the Analysis and Recommendations section of the 1999 issue of *The Future of Children* was to find the responsible way of presenting the bad news. In spite of the tenor of the discussion with program evaluators and program directors in the summer of 1998, the journal’s issue editors sought a middle ground that would not condemn home visiting as a service approach but would raise alarms about how it was being used. Dr. Behrman’s introduction strikes that note in interpreting the evaluation results:

The results summarized in this journal issue illustrate the difficulty of changing lives of children and parents who live in conditions of disadvantage. Results varied widely across program models, program sites, and families, and across the domains of human experience the programs are designed to address. For example, several home visiting models produced some benefits in parenting or in the prevention of child abuse and neglect on at least some measures. No model produced large or consistent benefits in child development or in the rates of health-related behaviors such as immunizations or well-baby check-ups. Only two program models included in this journal issue explicitly sought to alter mothers’ lives, and, of those, one produced significant effects at more than one site, when assessed with rigorous studies. All programs struggled to implement

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<sup>23</sup> The Foundation funded another forum for discussion of the evaluation findings. Following the National Research Council meeting, the National Association of State-Based Advocacy Organizations coordinated a meeting of child advocates, focusing on early childhood programs, including home visiting and center-based services, and particularly on how advocates should work with state legislatures that they had been lobbying for home visiting dollars in light of the new evaluation evidence.

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services as intended by their program models and, especially, to engage families in the programs. For instance, families typically received only about half the number of home visits that they were scheduled to receive, and many families received only 20 to 40 hours of service over the course of several years. (Statement of Purpose, inside front cover.)

The Analysis and Recommendations, written by Deanna Gomby, Patti Culross, and Richard Behrman, kept to the middle ground of interpretation as well. For example,

Results are mixed and, where positive, often modest in magnitude. Studies have revealed some benefits in parenting practices, attitudes, and knowledge, but the benefits for children in the areas of health, development, and abuse and neglect rates that are supposed to derive from these changes have been more elusive. Only one program model revealed marked benefits in maternal life course. When benefits were achieved in any area, they were often concentrated among particular subgroups of families, but there was little consistency in these subgroups across program models or, in some cases, across sites that implemented the same program model, making it difficult to predict who will benefit most in the future. (p. 10)

In weighing the results and presenting their implications, the authors of the Analysis and Recommendations section were more directive about policy and practice than they had been in 1993, but not as negative as Dr. Behrman was privately inclined:

We conclude that there were some weaknesses in program implementation but that the programs were implemented about as well as most home visiting programs, and that the evaluations were relatively rigorous. Therefore, we believe that the results are a fairly accurate reflection of what can be expected from the home visiting programs that were assessed. This suggests two main implications: (1) existing home visiting programs should focus on efforts to enhance implementation and the quality of their services, and (2) even if those improvements are made, more modest expectations of programs are needed, and therefore home visiting should not be relied upon as the sole service strategy for families with young children. (p. 15)

### **Reception of the 1999 Journal Issue on Home Visiting**

“Taken aback” was a phrase used by several of the involved program and evaluation people about the final draft of the journal issue. Among the national home visiting program staff, there was concern that this document was going to look negative. As Elisabet Eklind, Executive Director of HIPPIY USA, described the concern, “It [the journal] wasn’t an endorsement in any way. If you only read the journal, you’d think that was all there was to know or say.” The HIPPIY response was to prepare a brief analysis of the journal’s review of the HIPPIY research, with the goal of clarifying points that the researchers overlooked or misstated – importantly, that the article was based on an analysis of data collected between 1990 and 1992 – and describing the changes that the program had already made as a result of the research and other information. This

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analysis was distributed to local HIPPY programs because the national office anticipated inquiries. At the time, however (September 1999), “there wasn’t the strong, broad reaction that we had anticipated,” according to Elisabet Eklind.

The national Parents as Teachers organization took similar steps to prepare for questions or criticism, putting out a response to the journal review of PAT in their national newsletter (fall 1999 issue). This article raised “challenges of randomized trials,” pointed to impacts that were significant, summarized one other PAT evaluation with positive effects and reported that 10 studies with positive gains were summarized in an appendix of the journal, and described program improvement efforts under way or planned. Mildred Winter, retired President of PAT, said, “the fear was about [what might happen] when the report came out because, in essence, it said that home visiting can’t be shown to make much difference.” PAT staff prepared their Board of Directors for the journal issue, “but there was very little fallout from the report,” Mildred Winter said.

Deborah Daro, evaluator for Healthy Families America, told a similar story. Although she found some of the language in the preview copy of the journal’s Analysis and Recommendations “unfortunate,” after a few months “the language paled away” and some of the program models began working on incorporating the lessons from the research into their models and practices.

Several people interviewed for this case study have noted a longer-term effect of the journal issue, however: It is widely quoted – as was intended by the editors – but often by people who wish to promote another approach. According to Elisabet Eklind, “the journal is used as fuel by those who want to denounce home visiting for ideological reasons” and is quoted by people who have an impact on the Zero to Three field.

Ann Segal observes the opposite: While the Packard Foundation’s evaluation strategy in the area of home visitation raised issues of effectiveness briefly, “there is still money pouring into the programs that have no evidence because they are cheap and because they have advocates that believe in them because they have seen some changed lives.” Linda Wollesen, a public health nurse involved in implementing the Nurse Home Visitation model in cooperation with the original Salinas Valley PAT staff in Monterey County, California, presents the service provider’s perspective on the research findings:

How come there are any of us left out there “doing nothing” with tremendously needy families while the evidence for the need for early intervention mounts? ...Knowing the stakes these families and infants are facing and what will be the case without intervention...stopping services isn’t an ethical option either. It’s like the medical model when a treatment for cancer is only “modestly effective” but death is the alternative. Most of us would pick the treatment and hope for a better one – which is, I hope, the ultimate effect that all the Foundation work will have.

### **The Foundation’s Final Decisions on Home Visiting**

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Dick Behrman would have curtailed grantmaking in home visiting after publication of the evaluation results, but Deanna Gomby and then-CFC-director Lorraine Zippiroli persuaded the Foundation's Board to approve a final \$3 million package of grants for quality improvement and implementation work by four of the major program models.<sup>24</sup> From Dr. Gomby's perspective, this was a move by the Foundation to "put its money where its mouth was." In other words, having strongly urged home visiting programs to attend to issues of implementation and the quality of services in the 1999 *The Future of Children* issue, Dr. Gomby believed that the responsible role of the Foundation was to provide the resources to make those efforts possible. The specific journal recommendation was:

Existing home visiting programs and their national headquarters should launch efforts to improve the implementation and quality of services. These efforts should including the ongoing assessments of practices concerning the enrollment, engagement, and attrition of families; training requirements and support for staff; and delivery of curricula. National headquarters for key home visiting models should bring together researchers, practitioners, and parents to formulate practice standards and guidelines for their own models, and a dialogue should begin to create learning and quality improvement efforts for the field as a whole. (p.22)

The Foundation also made a grant to Harvard University to "facilitate the development of a learning strategy, workplan, and benchmarks among six national home visiting models" – the beginning of a collaborative of home visiting professionals led by Heather Weiss of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Deborah Daro of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and Barbara Wasik of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This collaborative is now called the Home Visiting Forum and is co-funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

While many of the people interviewed for this case study thought that these final grants constituted an important contribution – if not the most important contribution -- the Foundation made to the field, there was also the view that with these grants the Foundation was trying to "mollify" the program people by putting out a "small" amount of money for program improvement. In this view, even though "foundations are not likely to say to program people that you're making a mistake," the Packard Foundation "upset a lot of people in the field" and "had seldom had such fallout." "It was the first [journal issue] that had generated such negative results."

### **Perspectives on the Packard Foundation's Impact in Home Visiting**

"The research on home visiting was very much a Rorschach test: Different people saw different things." This was one of Deanna Gomby's summing-up observations about her 12-year involvement in home visiting at the Packard Foundation. To one scientist, the ink blot of home visiting research says:

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<sup>24</sup> These were HIPPY, Parents as Teachers, the Nurse Home Visitation Program, and Healthy Families America.

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I would hope that Packard and other foundations would appreciate their critical role in funding experimental evaluations of early intervention programs – which often requires sustained funding if more than immediate outcomes are of interest, and they always are – and then “telling it the way it is” as the results come in. No one else is doing this and it is crucially important.

To a national home visiting program director, the ink blot says:

You can't make the generalizations unless you have better facts or a broader look than was taken in [the 1999 journal issue]. We just felt that the research was taking too narrow of a look. How can you represent the worth of a program with one study?

An image used by several interviewees for this case study to communicate the effect of the evaluation research that was sponsored, interpreted and published by the Foundation is a speeding train. In 1993, when the first issue of *The Future of Children* about home visiting was published, the train was already hurtling down the tracks. Some of those involved said that the publication of the evaluation findings in the 1999 issue slowed the train down, one said the train didn't slow down much and only made a station stop, one said that the field needed to put the brakes on and did.

Dick Behrman used another transportation metaphor: His sense is that the home visiting work at the Foundation did stimulate further research and “it took the wind out of the advocates' sails and made them be more reasonable in their claims.” The Foundation “tried to modulate the contributions of all” who had a stake or position on home visiting and now, in the field, advocates are more receptive to building in evaluation.

The “wake-up call” was another frequent description for the Foundation's effect on the home visiting field. One view was that before the evaluation results eventually published in the 1999 issue of *The Future of Children* were available, there had been too much expansion of the home visiting approach without thinking about quality and staffing. Another view was that, while some of the responses were purely defensive, others were along the lines of “we need to do a better job” on implementation and quality control. Carol Singley, coordinator of parent education of the adult school in Monterey County that housed the Parents as Teachers program that was the original impetus for the Packard Foundation's work in the area of home visiting, saw the evaluation experience as a means of learning how to do a better job, beginning with learning what the job was, but she also said that after the evaluation results were out, “we never went back to the Foundation for PAT funding because we assumed that avenue was closed.” The program in the Salinas Valley is still called PAT but it operates on contracts with the county's social services department.

There are also institutional and organizational perspectives on the Foundation's contribution. Heather Weiss commented that “Deanna single-handedly has made an enduring contribution with unusual continuity,” but identified several key organizational factors -- being in a foundation context that respected research; Dick Behrman with his vision and standards in the background; *The Future of Children* journal amassing the



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evidence with a particular sensibility; and [the staff] “knowing that research is supposed to inform policy and practice.” Dr. Weiss also observed that home visiting was a field in adolescence at the time the Packard Foundation got involved; the issue was not going to go away, but the field was at an early enough stage of growth to be able to have an impact with research.

New state and local funding has become available for early intervention, school readiness, and family support programs over the period of the Packard Foundation’s work in home visiting, raising the stakes for evidence of effectiveness. For example, California residents had approved the Proposition 10 referendum in 1999 that provides funding to counties for coordinated efforts to improve early childhood outcomes, and other states put money into similar initiatives, “creating real competition,” according to Dr. Weiss. “All the [home visitation] models are competing to get public dollars in lots of places.”

### **PERSONS INTERVIEWED**

Richard Behrman, David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Lynn Courier, National Parents As Teachers

Deborah Daro, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

Elisabet Eklind, HIPPI USA

Deanna Gomby, David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Carol Larson, David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Kate McGilley, National Parents As Teachers

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Marli Melton, Community Foundation for Monterey County

David Olds, University of Colorado (Denver) Prevention Research Center

Deborah Phillips, Georgetown University

Ann Segal, Consultant (formerly of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Carol Singley, Monterey County Adult School

Mary Wagner, SRI International

Heather Weiss, Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Mildred Winter, retired President, Parents As Teachers

Linda Wollesen, Monterey County Department of Public Health