

Premature babies a big inspiration

By **Robert Fedele**

ASCOT Vale mother Anne-Marie Hammon knows first hand the challenges that spring up with a premature baby.

Her youngest child, Hannah, now four, spent 155 days in hospital after being born at 24 weeks.

"The first three weeks were touch and go," she said.

"I had two normal deliveries and then along came Hannah.

"Juggling being a mum and having one in hospital was very difficult."

On a ventilator for 55 days, Hannah's time in hospital was marred by breathing difficulties, infections and blood transfusions. Even though the day she came home was a special moment, it was still tinged with anxiety.

"It was very nerve-racking," she said.

"When you've had a child in hospital under 24-hour care, seven days a week, and then you bring her home with no nursing staff to help — it's very scary."

While in hospital, Ms Hammon and four fellow mothers in similar situations formed a bond, eventually creating Life's Little Treasures — a support group for families with



Big dreams: Twins Elysse and Zachary, 4, visit the chooks at Horseshoe Bend Farm. **Picture: Anna Joski**

premature babies. "We just felt that you get this fantastic support when you are in hospital and once you leave you have to fend for yourself."

The group, which now has 35 members, celebrated National Premmie Day last week with a family fun day at the Horseshoe Bend Farm in Keilor.

Ms Hammon said the support group aimed to raise the aware-

ness of premature births, with more than 21,000 babies arriving early each year in Australia and more than 6000 requiring critical life support and intensive care.

The group regularly returns to the hospital.

Details on Life's Little Treasures available at www.lifeslittletreasures.org.au