

Small start, big h

KATE BRUCE-ROSSER

WHEN Parool Shah's son was born 11 weeks early, weighing less than a tub of butter, it was a group of other mothers who helped her to cope.

Now her son Luke is a boisterous four-year-old and the Armadale mother is reaching out to the families of premature babies Australia-wide.

Ms Shah is a founding member of the National Premmie Foundation, which will open this month.

"When Luke was born he weighed less than a tub of margarine, just 915 grams, and he didn't look like a baby," she said.

"It is a very traumatic journey for parents. Your baby is hooked up to all sorts of machinery and you can't touch them. What these babies go through physically is just so much."

To survive the harrowing experience, a group of mothers banded

together and formed Life's Little Treasures.

"It is very comforting to meet others who can provide information from a parental perspective," Ms Shah said. "When you're in the hospital in those early days it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but there is hope."

Life's Little Treasures is one of six support groups that have joined to form the national foundation, aiming to increase awareness and support services.

"As a starting point, we want to set up a support group at every hospital with a neonatal intensive-care unit," Ms Shah said.

The foundation has begun a 24-hour support line and hopes eventually to provide hospitals with equipment and money for research.

» Details: phone 1300 PREMBABY or go to www.prembaby.org.au



Parool Shah, with her son Luke