

Fun and games in cause of science



Focus of attention: Jenna, left, with another Raino Study child, Alex Fielding, 12, near the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Perth

Picture: Andy Tyndal

Simone Pittis

FOR 13 years, Jenna Dohmen has grown up with surveys, questionnaires, blood tests and stress reports, and been asked to ride bikes, throw balls and run around parks—all in the name of research.

Jenna, with 2400 other West Australian children, is part of the Raino Study, which has tracked their physical, emotional and genetic development since their mothers were 18 weeks pregnant.

Now 13, Jenna has recently completed the latest assess-

ment. She had to wear a pedometer—which records her every step—to monitor her activity during the week.

At the end of each day, she logged the findings in a diary. And she is having more tests today at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Subiaco, Perth.

The results of the study will be collated and released over the next few years.

Jenna's parents, Julie and Wayne Dohmen, said they had agreed to take part in the study—which marks its 13th anniversary this week—to

'Jenna had a good understanding and has been on board with it all the way'

Wayne Dohmen
Jenna's father

aid research into children's health.

The Dohmens had no idea the research would continue for so long but are proud to be part of research recognised by health specialists worldwide.

"Jenna has had a good understanding from the

beginning that what she was doing was going to contribute at the end of the day to something far greater and important to others, and so she has really been on board with it all the way," Mr Dohmen said.

"Part of the study is finding out information about the parents as well—their degree of exercise, lifestyle, all that sort of thing. We found it quite interesting, and it keeps us on track."

The Raino Study, which has achieved a response rate of more than 70 per cent, is

Australia's most intensive examination of children's physical development.

Those involved are assessed throughout their mothers' pregnancy, then at birth, and again at ages 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10. Researchers aim to follow the children into their 20s.

The children have contributed to international findings on foetal, respiratory and cardiovascular health.

The latest phase of the assessment will measure the links between activity levels and stress, mental health problems and obesity.