



Autism app praised

By **ROSANNA
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FORGET plant-hungry zombies and matching candy games, staff at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research believe a WA-developed iPad app may hold the key to improving outcomes for autistic children.

As mother to two children with autism, Kristie Anderson said there were days at home she would sit on her hands, sigh and wonder: 'What should we do now?'

After her three-year-old son Hayden was diagnosed in May, Ms Anderson was asked to take part in a Telethon Institute study into the effectiveness of the TOBY Playpad app.

"From the day Hayden began using the app, it has been incredibly empowering for me as a parent," she said.

"It's not about sitting there with your eyes glued to the screen going 'tap, tap, tap...'

"Instead, the Playpad



Research assistant Alena Dass shows Hayden Anderson how to use the app, watched by Hayden's mother Kristie and trial co-ordinator Jo Granich.

gives me the tools to set up therapy activities that work on key areas like gross and fine motor skills and speech.

"We do everything on it, from a playdough activity to doing the laundry and sorting the socks."

Telethon Institute autism research director Andrew Whitehouse said the study would be the first in the world to document the effectiveness of an educational app for children with autism.

"There is now a lot of evidence showing that intense and sustained therapy can provide significant benefits to children with autism," Professor Whitehouse said.

"However, these interventions come at considerable financial cost and are subject to waiting lists, so a significant proportion of families are unable to access these therapies."

Study co-ordinator Jo Granich said newly

diagnosed families often felt a sense of loss, isolation and helplessness about what they could do for their autistic child.

"We hope that this study will tell us that the app is not only teaching their child early learning skills, but also helping parents to understand how to teach and interact with their child," Mrs Granich said.

Email autism@childhealthresearch.org.au or visit autism.childhealthresearch.org.au.