



OLPC kickstarts notebook program for indigenous children

Non-profit organisation plans to distribute 400,000 devices within the next five years

Non-profit organisation, One Laptop per Child (OLPC), has deployed its first batch of notebooks to indigenous children in remote Australian regions at a Northern Territory (NT) launch event.

Branching out to Australia two years ago, the organisation was established in the US to provide disadvantaged primary school children access to educational resources. So far, OLPC has trialed the notebook scheme across Oceanic nations including Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

The organisation has a commercial agreement with Taiwanese manufacturer, Quanta, to produce notebooks for \$US180 per unit. This week, a ceremony was held at one of the first three schools involved, Shepherdson College, on Elcho Island, NT, to kick off the Australian program. The territory's Department of Education and Training (DET) representatives were among the attendees as well as OLPC sponsors, the school body and members of the local community.

About 600 notebooks were involved in the initial rollout with Shepherdson College allocated 280 notebooks for children aged five to 12. The remainder will be shared across the other two participating schools - Rawa Community School in WA and Newcastle Waters in NT.

OLPC chairman, Geoff Anson, said the organisation is gearing up for a second deployment process.

"We will complete our trials in the three schools first and then look for other locations in NT and far north Queensland to move numbers up to 2000 units, 5000 units and then 20,000 units by year end," he said. "Our ultimate goal is to hand out 400,000 notebooks and we expect to do this within the next four to five years."

OLPC sponsor, Commonwealth Bank of Australia (ASX:CBA), will provide technical resources for notebook distribution and ongoing maintenance.

While the general lifespan of an average notebook is two to three years, Anson said the robust OLPC units will stand the test of time.

"You can't compare normal laptops to our units," he said. "As technology changes rapidly, it is our plan to continue to develop our laptops so there will be updates to the units to ensure we continue to meet the goals of delivering educational opportunities children needs."