



# Faraway kids in remote control



Students at Yirrkala school in East Arnhem Land with the laptops they received through the OLPC Australia program

## A new campaign seeks community support to get more computers to isolated schools

**SALLIE DON**

FOR the children of Yirrkala school, life in the remote Northern Territory community means less access than city kids to education technology.

Growing up in the isolated East Arnhem Land region, the students have struggled to compete with their peers in metropolitan areas.

The One Laptop Per Child scheme, which aims to provide 400,000 children aged four to 15 living in remote areas with access

to their own computer, was launched in Yirrkala school in March.

The school principal, Geoff Perry, said it had given the children a chance to engage with technology they would have otherwise never had the chance to learn on.

"The kids love them," he said of the laptops.

"The initial buzz has died down, but the kids still really love using them."

He said the remote schools in the area were nowhere near having one computer per child in the classrooms.

"This [scheme] allows you to get much closer to that goal, without having the massive cost outlay," he said.

About 4000 children in Australia have received the low-cost,

low-power "XO Laptop" since its rollout.

But the 26-year-old executive director of OLPC Australia, Rangan Srikhanta, said they had plans to do better.

"That is just 1 per cent of our target. We're not where we need to be; we need to get 400,000 (laptops) out there to schools," he said.

Mr Srikhanta is a founder of the program, which is part of an international organisation providing XO Laptops to disadvantaged children globally.

Local backers of the scheme are News Limited (the publisher of *The Australian*), Telstra and the Commonwealth Bank.

Aiming to get closer to the 400,000 student target, Telstra has partnered with OLPC and

launched a promotional campaign to encourage community support.

For every 100 text messages received, Telstra will provide OLPC with one more laptop, up to 500 laptops.

While Mr Srikhanta acknowledged that this figure would go only a way towards OLPC's target, he said that Telstra was trying to raise awareness.

"Ultimately, we want the government to take ownership of this, so we reach a mass critical point with this project," he said.

*To support the Telstra OLPC campaign, text the words "OLPC Australia Charity Text" to mobile number 044 SUPPORT (0447 877 678). The line will be open until December 15*