



Aboriginal kids get charity XO laptops

By James Regan in Elcho Island Reuters June 12, 2009 12:00am

- ☉ Charity laptops given to indigenous schools
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THE global charity program One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) is being rolled out in Australia to help combat illiteracy and truancy.

Aboriginal school children on Elcho Island, off the coast of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, have received rugged green laptops to use for homework and communication. "Hopefully, my children will become digitally connected to the rest of the world," resident Marcus Lacey said.

"This island is not very close to anything."

Organizers behind the program hope to combat the monotony of island life with new-found interests such as surfing the net and offering the 1200 school-age children opportunities to learn of the world beyond the dense mangrove swamps that surround the sea.

"We're trying to give these kids a shot they might not otherwise get growing up here," said Barry Vercoe, director of OLPC's Asia-Pacific arm.

To date, about 1.5 million laptops have been distributed worldwide. 2000 of those have been given to three schools in indigenous Australian communities, where illiteracy can be multi-generational and English is hardly, if ever, spoken.

The charity, founded by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researcher Nicholas Negroponte, has given computers to school-age children in countries including Cambodia, Rwanda and Papua New Guinea.

Through private donations and corporate sponsorships Mr Vercoe hopes to donate 400,000 computers in Australia over the next two or three years, all directly to indigenous school children.

"When we have the opportunity to inoculate against ignorance and illiteracy we must take it," Mr Vercoe said.

Gary Barnes, an administrator from Australia's Northern Territory Department of Education, said the arrival of computers on the island can help teachers but is no cure-all.

"These are not silver bullets and on their own they will not make huge differences," Barnes said.

But local school teacher Dianne Dickinson was encouraged by the laptop program.
"Our students enjoy using them, which is a start."

Links

OLPC Australia - www.laptop.org.au