



OLPC Australia eyes 20,000 laptops for kids

Stuart Kennedy | *July 23, 2009*

THE local arm of the global One Laptop Per Child organisation wants to place 20,000 laptops in the hands of primary and early secondary school children in remote regions of Australia by the end of 2010.



Students at Shepardson College on Elcho Island with their OLPC laptops. From right: Sheena Bawu, 11, Kristy Bitika, 10 and Dannielle Lungurrwuy, 11.
Pic: Nicholas Welsh

Founded by technology visionary **Nicholas Negroponte** in 2005, OLPC is a non-profit firm created to raise education standards in third world countries by equipping school children with a rugged, low power consumption laptops able to survive outside classrooms. The **OLPC laptops** feature strong networking capabilities and an educational software suite that promotes collaboration between students and their teachers.

So far most of the 1.1 million OLPC laptops produced have gone to South and Central America, although a scheme to distribute 100,000 machines is in place in Rwanda, Africa.

In May OLPC Australia began rolling out 400 of the distinctive white and green XO-1 laptops to Shepherdson College on Elcho Island, Newcastle Waters in the Northern Territory and Rawa Community School in WA.

These first recipients helped establish the educational programs and infrastructure needed for wider roll outs, said OLPC Australia executive director Rangan Srikhanta, who believes about 400,000 children in Australia qualified as outside the normal grid of educational opportunity and could benefit from OLPC's help.

The next phase, which is still dependent on locking in funding of about \$US2 million (\$2.45m) will see 5000 machines handed out to schools in remote communities by the middle of 2010. Mr Srikhanta said arrangements for this stage of the plan were about 75 per cent complete.

According to US-based OLPC president Charles Kane, who is in Australia this week to raise awareness and funding for the program, the machines for the second phase will be the new XO 1.5 laptops which

boost the modest computing power and memory in the first model with a faster processing chip and 4GB of storage instead of just 1GB.

If it finds funding, phase three of the local OLPC plan will see another 15,000 machines going to children in remote communities at schools across Australia at a cost of \$US6-\$US8 million by the end of 2010.

Organisations which fund OLPC in Australia include the Commonwealth Bank, News Ltd and Newcrest Mining and talks are underway with state and federal education departments about further funding.

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