

BELINDA STRONACH

The Honourable Belinda Stronach
On the Occasion of the Launch of OLPC Canada



one laptop per child
Canada

Ottawa, Ontario
September 29, 2010

Thank you Clint for your kind introduction and for your support of this program from the very beginning.

I would like to thank Pauline Decontie, our Elder for blessing this event and opening this launch in a good way.

Minister Bentley, OLPC Partners, ladies and gentlemen and of course our OLPC youngsters - thank you for joining us this morning. We have all been working toward this day for more than 2 years and I am so excited to stand with all of you to launch this incredible program.

You just had a chance to see a short video that captures the many partners we have had in this endeavour and how unique the laptop is. After the formal part of our program I hope you will all take a few moments to use the computer and familiarize yourself with it if you have not already done so.

As many of you know, my Foundation has put a premium on the importance of partnership. I can say without a doubt that we would not be standing here today if we did not have the commitment and partnership of the following entities and individuals:

- Minister Bentley and the Government of Ontario – the first government to jump on board.
- Vale represented by Mark Travers. Vale has made the largest financial contribution to this project with a contribution of \$1.2 million dollars over 3 years and in addition has shared their thoughts about the content and outreach – their advice has been instrumental to the launch of this programme. A special thank you to Erin for championing this program and working with my team.
- BMO Financial Group represented this morning by Stephen Fay, National Director, Aboriginal Banking. BMO Financial Group is allocating \$750 thousand dollars to this program over the next 3 years. I recall the meeting we had with The Honourable Ed Lumley and Nada Ristich and the potential they saw in this program. Thank you for your support.

Funding is absolutely crucial - it is true.

Of equal value is the content in a program such as this one.

We are proud to be working with strong, creative and innovative partners who share with us the importance of using technology to harness the potential of future generations.

I cannot stress how important their contributions have been to ensuring this laptop deals with more than just connecting children to the internet.

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Their contributions mean that teachers have more tools to engage their students in the classroom.

Their contributions mean that students will have their own tool to use at home with their parents and their siblings.

Their content means that where children may not have constant connectivity they can use the varied programs to improve their reading skills, art skills and gain a better understanding of their culture.

My foundation is proud to call the following individuals and organizations our partners:

- The Centre for Addiction & Mental Health represented by Dr. Catherine Zahn.
- Ekomini, represented by Philippe Racine
- Safe Kids Canada, represented by Shawna Dempsey

Partners who could not be here today and have been incredibly supportive include:

- Buffy Saint-Marie and her team at Cradleboard
- ParticipACTION led by Kelly Murumets
- And the more than 20 authors who have given their books to this program.

On behalf of my team – THANK YOU ALL SO VERY MUCH.

We hope you are as pleased as we are.

Just a few words about why we chose to go down this path.

We know that there is a big disparity between the education of Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children and I could stand before you and state statistic after statistic, fact after fact and one story after another about how troubling the conditions are for many of these young Canadians.

Rather than do that, I will focus the few minutes I have on how OLPC Canada will contribute to the intellectual, emotional and physical health and wellbeing of up to 5000 children in communities across Canada.

Here are some key things to consider:

This is a very strategic investment in two areas that transform lives – education and technology. The marriage between these two unleashes opportunities that are limitless when we empower children with these tools.

Second, the content is standalone so students can continue their learning in and outside of the classroom. In rural and remote communities this is a tremendous asset and one that parents welcome.

Third, the schools who are recipients of this program will have demonstrated a high level of commitment from the principal of the school to the teachers. They must be able to integrate the laptop in their classrooms.

Fourth, this is a pilot program and through a comprehensive training and evaluation process we will determine how we should calibrate the program to expand it. We will also consider how to take what we are learning and introduce it to high risk, low income youth in Canada.

Finally, we are part of a global initiative and so what we develop we share and what is developed elsewhere we can use. The open source character of this laptops means we can keep the laptop fresh while being cost effective.

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I would like to quote Toni-Marie who is in Grade 2 at Lloyd S. King primary school. When asked about the laptop during one of our focus tests, Toni-Marie said:

OX Lap top

The “OX lap top” was really great because it could help us in pronouncing words in the “speak mode”. Also I liked the browse or the internet because you could have access to any site like Google, Wikipedia etc... Some other things I liked were math tools, chat room, maze and paint. You could even turn the laptop screen to show other people what you’re looking at and you can fold it down to read like a book. Overall, I liked the computers and hope L.S.K. gets to use them.

Toni-Marie Green

What we learned from these children is that this tool will encourage them to want to come to school. To want to learn and to want to share what they learn with their peers and their families.

And when we spoke with teachers, principals and community leaders each of them relayed the sentiment that they see this laptop as an important tool, an investment that will help students connect to the world, dream big and seek out opportunities they would not otherwise consider. That, ladies and gentlemen, is why we are doing this.

It is now my pleasure to announce the first recipient schools:

Before I turn the microphone over to Minister Bentley I would like to acknowledge Wendy Johnson who has worked tirelessly to bring this program to life. Wendy, thank you - for your passion and your commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us this morning to launch this important investment in Aboriginal children.

Thank you.