

How 27 XO's Have Changed The Lives Of An Entire Community



Sometimes small changes have a way of growing into something much bigger. This was certainly the case with a small pilot deployment of 27 XO laptops at the Atlas Elementary School in an Afghan refugee community near Islamabad, Pakistan. Before the non-profit OLPC Pakistan brought their XO laptops to Atlas School, the teachers kept order with big sticks, and smiles were seldom seen on the faces of the refugee children.

Within a few short weeks of the XO's arrival, students were happily using their laptops to learn language, math, art, music, and geography. They were even learning English using E-books in their native Pashto language. At the same time, school attendance and student behavior improved. Big sticks were no longer as important as they were before the XO's arrived.

As they became more proficient in the use of the laptops, children cooperated in teaching other children how to use some of the Activities. They even learned to dismantle an XO's and do simple hardware repairs.

But then, the school year ended and disaster struck. The owner of the building where the school was housed, said they could no longer use it for a school. While the principal hopes to find a new location for the school, for now, it has ceased to exist.

Not to be deterred by this setback, OLPC Pakistan has continued with a second pilot school deployment at the Mehfooz Shahid Model School in the Korral Valley, beginning with XO's for all of the eight girls and seven boys in the school's fourth grade class. An additional ten laptops have been placed in the school library where other students can use them and check them out overnight for use at home. More XO's are on order, and plans are to eventually have one for every child in the school.

But, what has happened to the children of Atlas School and their XO's? The OLPC team that had been working with them wondered too. They went looking for the children and found them spending their days helping to support their families by selling fruits and vegetables in the market or picking through trash heaps looking for things to recycle. They found something else too...the XO's.

The children still had their laptops and carried them to their work every day. Whenever time permitted, they continued to learn and play with their laptops. They formed an XO Club and met in the evenings at each others homes to exchange ideas and show the new things they had discovered and created on their laptops.

The entire refugee community began to benefit from the laptops as the XO Club members took them to community meetings and allowed adults to use them to learn. They also shared them with their family members and other children, helping them to learn with their laptops.

The school remained closed last year but the former students continue to learn and progress thanks to their OLPC XO laptops loaded with learning software. The small investment of fewer than 30 XO laptops has changed the lives on an entire refugee community for the better.

You can learn more about the XO Learning Club and the children from Atlas School today:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWk4bQu0Ue>

This account was written by OLPC Support Gang member Caryl Bigenho, based on field reports from OLPC Afghanistan and OLPC Pakistan team members with additions by OLPC Support Gang Volunteers.

