## World-Wide One Laptop Per Child Mentors Visit St. John This Week

Written by Jaime Elliott
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**Students in Haiti learn computer programming on XO laptops with the help of a One Laptop Per Child mentor, above, opening a whole new world.**

Mentors, software developers and other key figures from across the globe working with the international One Laptop Per Child movement are gathering this week right on Love City.

The first ever OLPC Realness Summit will kick off on Friday, May 28, at Maho Bay Campground. Bringing together members from five continents and the Caribbean, the summit was designed as an event of "no hype, no bashing, no wireless, no room service with just straight talk about what works, what doesn't, and why we do what we do," according to organizers.

The OLPC Realness Summit is sponsored by Waveplace, a non-profit organization which educates children with digital media across the Caribbean and has created programs developed in Nicaragua, Haiti, Florida and right here on St. John.



**A Waveplace mentor leads a computer class in Nicaragua.**

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"People who have done OLPC deployments around the world will be joining together for the first time ever on St. John," said Beth Santos, Waveplace outreach coordinator. "There will be people from Afghanistan, Brazil, Haiti and Europe coming to St. John to talk about how their deployments are coming, how they solve different challenges and will work together to find solutions."

Starting from the idea that putting laptops into children's hands and teaching them how to use them could literally change the world, Waveplace has deployed mentors across the globe to teach students digital media.

Combining mathematical principles and storytelling skills, students in Waveplace pilot programs use $200 XO laptops which were designed by MIT Media Lab technicians. Waveplace was founded by frequent St. John visitor Timothy Falconer who launched the first pilot program at Guy Benjamin School in 2007.

With mentors working in vastly different regions, it is difficult — and up until this week  has proven impossible — for teachers to gather and share stories of both successes and challenges.

"It's such a big, broad organizations with deployments across the world, it's really difficult for us to sit down and talk to each other," said Santos. "There is just a whole world of people and there is no real central core of information."

With the movement still in its infancy, mentors must tackle problems as they arise, but many of the same challenges are often faced in numerous locations.
"This is really a constructionist vision and people learn by doing," said Santos. "There is no instructional manual for the program per se, so the realness is just the actual working and teaching."

The lack of electricity, for example, has been faced by several deployed mentors and an

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ingenious idea from Afghanistan could be the answer, explained Santos.

"A group from Afghanistan is coming and they've created a desk that you can pedal and through the pedal create power," she said. "They were having trouble with reliable electricity so with the desk students can pedal away and use their computers."

The summit will also serve to allow mentors to share their diverse stories and learn from each other.

"Some countries don't know what is really going on with the OLPC program," said Santos. "One of the deployments I did was in Sao Tome, in Africa, and worked with local authorities who had computers, but didn't know how to teach students to use them. I was going into these classrooms and there all these computers in a closet."

"Everyone has totally different experiences that we can share with each other," said the Waveplace outreach coordinator. "This will be a great way for us all to connect, like a big OLPC family reunion."

In addition to the summit, Waveplace is also hosting a mentor training workshop and three pilot programs for St. John students.

The workshop, which runs from May 24 through June 2, is designed to train mentors to go out and teach students and other teachers how to use XO laptops. After completing the workshop, mentors will be prepared for deployment around the globe to spread the OLPC movement.

"We're looking for more mentors right now, especially from St. John," said Santos. "Anyone who is older than high school age and has an interest in learning how to use these computers and learning how to teach children would be ideal. It would also be good to be interested in travel as the mentors would be able to go out and do this long-term as well."

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Sure to keep themselves busy during their Love City stay, Waveplace officials are also sponsoring a 60-student pilot program, the second to be launched in Love City. Waveplace launched its first pilot program on St. John at Guy Benjamin School in 2007.

This year's OLPC pilot program will be taught to third to fifth grade students from each St. John elementary school.

A total of 60 students from GBS, Julius E. Sprauve School and Gifft Hill School will start learning computer programming on May 24. The pilot program will wrap up on June 16.

The sessions will be videotaped and streamed through Waveplace's website at a later date. For more information on the workshop, summit or pilot programs check out http://waveplace.com or http://realness.org.