



Taking stock of an alternative route in life

By **LINDSAY MURDOCH**
 DARWIN

STOCKMEN call it the *McLeod's Daughters* syndrome.

Every year dozens of young people who have watched *McLeod's Daughters* on television come from the southern states to help fill a shortage of stockmen on cattle stations in Australia's north.

But strategic projects manager of the Indigenous Land Corporation, Paul Jenkins, says most of them do not last much longer than a gap year in the harsh north. "Most of them only stay one, possibly two years before they go back to university or another job," he says.

Now government agencies and cattlemen are pushing young Aborigines into full-time jobs on the stations, hoping they will become career stockmen (or women).

Tanya Callanan, 30, says she is proud to be taking up the same horse work as her Aboriginal mother and grandfather, who worked cattle on land that is now Kakadu National Park.

"The work is worth getting

out of bed for," Ms Callanan, a former ranger at Kakadu, says. "It's the smell of the leather, the smell of the horses, being able to handle horses and read and muster the cattle.

"And nothing beats sitting down around the campfire at sunset after a hard day's work swapping yarns with your mates."

Ms Callanan's mother, Margaret, became a paraplegic after a horse accident. But Ms Callanan says this pushed her to be a better horse person.

The Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association has secured jobs for eight first-year indigenous stockmen who are among 24 young Aborigines on a two-week training course at Tipperary Station, 150 kilometres south of Darwin. Ms Callanan hopes that when the course ends on Thursday she will secure one of four vacancies at the station, which runs 75,000 cattle.

The Department of Families, Housing Community Services is

funding the Indigenous Land Corporation to convert 150 part-time positions for indigenous people to full-time jobs, 45 of them on the land.

The corporation was set up in 2005 to help Aborigines with land management.

Head of the cattlemen's association Luke Bowen says station owners are keen to employ Aboriginal stockmen who have done courses such as the one at Tipperary. "The industry wants to ensure all involved enjoy the training and the job and as a result come back next year," he says.

This week in the remote Arnhem Land community of Yirrkala, 200 indigenous children will each get a specially designed laptop computer as part of a One Laptop per Child (OLPC) Australia program.

The program, backed by some big Australian companies, plans to provide laptops to children in outer regional, remote and very remote communities.



Queenslander Alward Foster turns his stock horse as part of horsemanship training at Tipperary Station in the Northern Territory.

PICTURE:GLENN CAMPBELL