

Herald Sun online, 25/6/25

Volunteer group who help needy face uncertain future

https://www.heraldsun.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=HSWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.heraldsun.com.au%2Fleader%2Fnorth%2Fwecycle-fights-to-keep-northcote-home-off-commercial-businesses%2Fnews-story%2F0a88f7d335cdec12b3441ceeeef0b41b&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium&v1=HIGH-Segment-1-SCORE#~:text=WeCycle%20fights%20to%20keep%20Northcote.owned%20buildings%2C%20including%20Pioneer's%20Retreat.

Herald Sun



Volunteer group who help needy face uncertain future

A group of Northcote volunteers who restore and deliver free bicycles to disadvantaged families fear their popular service could cease as they fight to keep their home.

"A volunteer group that restores bikes for the needy could be booted from its base in Melbourne's north that has been opened up for potential commercial tenants, with fears it could spell the end of a popular service.

Northcote's WeCycle volunteers say they are in danger of losing their service which has fixed and delivered more than 1000 bikes to disadvantaged residents — including local refugees — if they are not offered a lease renewal at the Pioneer's Retreat building at Batman park.

It comes as Darebin City Council opened expressions of interests for new tenants to apply to lease nearly 30 council owned buildings, including Pioneer's Retreat.

But to the surprise of WeCycle its base — an isolated brick building with no toilets or hot water — was put in a category of sites aiming to attract commercial tenants.

At Monday's council meeting WeCycle submitted a petition signed by 715 people for the site to be reclassified as a community space.

WeCycle volunteer Simon Batterbury said the group would be in "severe trouble" if it was to go up against commercial operators keen on the site.

"We don't have enough turnover to have a commercial lease ... we probably will end up bidding our own premises but who knows," he said.

"It's a stranded asset in a local park ... it'd be hard to have a cafe there."

At Monday's council meeting Mr Batterbury told councillors the group's pledge had received widespread support,

"We received 715 signatures without even surveying the bicycle recipients which would be in their thousands by now," he said.

"We would like a motion to restore that community lease."

The group has restored bikes at Batman Park since January 2017.

WeCycle was launched in 2016 by Darebin residents Craig Jackson and Gayle Ilievski who within their first year delivered 80 bikes to refugees and asylum seekers.

WeCycle also works with organisations like AMES, Spectrum and Brotherhood of St Laurence to provide free bikes to disadvantaged families across Melbourne.

Its volunteers also conduct free bike checks for Darebin locals.

Mr Batterbury said the program helps connect families who “fallen on hard times” to the community.

“I delivered a bike two weeks ago to three Syrian kids who were just delighted,” he said,

“We do say that we find it really rewarding. Often the kids are most delighted because they can use them to go to schools or attend language classes.”

Darebin Council was contacted for comment.”