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Port Phillip Council slammed for youth 'graffiti' classes

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Anthony Dowsley

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"STREET art" classes run by a Melbourne council have been slammed as a nursery for graffiti vandals.

The ratepayer-funded workshops, using stencils and stickers, are aimed at youths from 12 to 19.

The council also provides several public sites around St Kilda where the teens can try their hand.

Port Phillip Mayor **Janet Cribbes** said street art was part of the inner-city landscape.

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"The workshops are an opportunity for us to educate young people on appropriate and legal outlets for graffiti," Cr Cribbes said.

But **Graffiti Hurts Australia** spokesman Scott Hilditch said the workshops gave teenagers the green light to vandalise city streets.

"It's sending out the wrong message," Mr Hilditch said.

"Graffiti breeds graffiti and other anti-social behaviour.

"Ratepayers' money could be used in other areas, helping the elderly, providing books to libraries and schools."

Mr Hilditch said vandals were also helping to force up rates across inner-Melbourne.



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Albert Park MP **Martin Foley** (Labor) had doubts about the street art classes.

"I don't think it will help, frankly," he said.

Mr Foley said he recently spent hours cleaning unsightly tags from the front of his office after a graffiti rampage along Park St, South Melbourne.

"Vandals tagged my bloody office in gold paint. It took me hours to get it off. It was on every building for 100m.

"I know people are getting jacked off with tagging on their property."

Cr Cribbes said the council did not support illegal graffiti and tried to remove it within two working days.

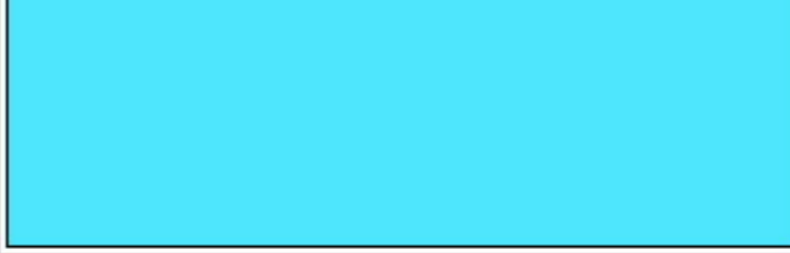
The council spent more than \$200,000 removing graffiti last financial year.

Under the street art program, the council provides space at St Kilda Junction as well as Astoria Paper Products, South Melbourne Light Rail, Balaclava Railway and Hewitson Reserve.

"**The City of Port Phillip** works with the young people in our community to find appropriate outlets for street art," Cr Cribbes said.

But the workshops are at odds with stringent new laws banning the sale of spray paint to minors.

Retailers face on-the-spot fines of more than \$2000 while minors found with spray cans or other graffiti paraphernalia can be penalised.



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