

Anti-graffiti campaigners angered by offer of free lessons

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ANTI-graffiti campaigners have slammed a street-art festival that will give free lessons to wannabe graffiti artists.

Those who want to paint murals will get free tutorials in the CBD next Saturday as part of the Croft Alley Project.

While the organisers claim they are "council supported" and promoting legal graffiti art, protesters say their students will practise their new skills illegally.

Residents Against Graffiti Everywhere spokesman Steve Beardon slammed the five-hour Don't Ban The Can workshop to be held in the Croft Institute in Croft Alley.

Zero tolerance was the only way to curb illegal graffiti: "What's next, a diploma in vandalism, and how to destroy private property?" he said.

"Graffiti is a gateway crime that leads to burglary, drug dealing, gang formation and violence. If this is all we have to offer our youth, it's time we brought back national service."



Jeremy and Matt, in front of a legal mural, insist their workshop will cut vandalism. Picture: Mitch Bear

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But Don't Ban The Can and Croft Alley Project directors Jeremy and Matt, who preferred not to give their surnames, said their lessons were for over-18s, "council supported" and would educate about legal graffiti.

"This encourages legal art. If you just do a zero-tolerance policy . . . all that's going to do is destroy the legal graffiti side of things. The only option then if a kid wants to express himself creatively is to go out and do it illegally," Matt said.

"We will be stressing the point of legal art, trying to convince those who come along how good the art can be if you produce it legally."

But Matt conceded they couldn't guarantee that any attendees had not been convicted of vandalism.

Graffiti Hurts Australia spokesman Scott Hilditch said there was no way to make sure the workshop's students would stick to legal spraying.

"The issue with legal walls is that they don't work," he said.

"We don't have an issue with spray cans. What we do have an issue is with how people use them against people's properties without permission."

Last month the Herald Sun revealed graffiti artists from all over the world would travel to Melbourne in January for a \$250,000 street art festival being run by Don't Ban the Can.

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