

Under Bondi stars a homeless haven

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Homeless people at Bondi Pavillion have been told by Waverley council to pack up and leave. LtoR Andre Mohammad 45 (Caribbean), Denis Wilson 71, Altaf Khar 44 (Kashmir), Gilbert Hona 30 (New Zealand) and Kevin St Alder 49. Source: The Daily Telegraph

HE helped plant many of the pine trees in Bondi Park, has been involved in numerous local community groups over the years and spends his days fishing in the ocean.

So when people suggest Kevin St Alder move to a more affordable area, his response is firm.

"I would rather be homeless in my area of choice than housed somewhere else," he said.

Mr St Alder is one of a group of nine homeless people who reside behind the landmark Bondi Pavilion at world-famous Bondi Beach.

Surrounded by some of the most expensive penthouses in Sydney, they have created a comfortable existence, with a portable gas stove, pots and pans, mirrors, bathroom scales, books, bikes and surfboards.

It is a little like a permanent camp site. On June 16 the group was notified it would be evicted yesterday when **Waverley Council** posted signs on the Pavilion walls saying they wanted to conduct a "maintenance and cleansing program".

With the help of a barrister, working pro bono, they were granted a Supreme Court injunction on Tuesday night which banned council or police from forcibly removing them.

Should the Bondi nine be moved on or left alone?

They will return to court on Friday seeking orders forcing the council to find them alternative accommodation.

"The cost of fencing to keep us out would be enough to house us all for a year," Mr St Alder said.

One of the men, Andre Mohammad, has lived there for eight years and has become a well-known member of the

community.

Opposition Leader **Malcolm Turnbull** gives him a wave every day on his morning walk.

"One or two have alcohol issues and one or two have mental health issues but there's a real sense of community and safety here that you don't get in other areas," Mr St Alder said. "No-one wants to be here. Everyone is embarrassed about being here."

Council staff and rangers have in the past been friendly, even given them brooms so they can keep the area tidy.

Waverley Mayor Sally Betts said council was working with the **Department of Housing, Mission Australia** and Norman Andrews House to find the men safe, clean and warm accommodation.

She said there had been reports of health and sanitary issues, vandalism, alcohol-fuelled antisocial behaviour and a number of visitors feeling intimidated and threatened by the growing gathering.

"At this stage, our offers of accommodation have been turned down, which is unfortunate, but I believe the offer remains firm if they change their mind," she said.

"We want them to have a warm and safe place to live - just not at the back of this public building."

SOURCE: <http://www.news.com.au/national/under-bondi-stars-a-homeless-haven/story-e6frfkp9-1225739798575>