

AIR LEAGUE SEARCHES FOR NEW MEMBERS

THE Parramatta Air League is putting up a desperate defence to stay in the city it has called home for nearly 80 years.



Pictures: PHIL ROGERS **Nicholas Adams and Malachi Mashiah are two of Parramatta's three air cadets.**

Where once the squadron hall was filled with regiments of young boys learning about flying planes, doing marching drills and playing games, the current members can be counted on one hand: three boys and two adults.

Rob Robey, who has been with the Air League for 52 years, said when the apartment buildings went up there was a change in attitude to children's outdoor activities.

"Before the apartments and computers, all children did was play outside," he said.

"Kids these days are wrapped in too much cotton wool. Now you can't even play bull rush in schools, and organising a camp away is just a nightmare.

"God forbid should anyone get hurt, then you are held to libel."

With little money coming in, Squadron Captain Charles Majarian has pinched every penny to keep the hall running and pay the ever-rising rate bill.

"The rates are killing us," he said.

"We can't even afford to get a phone or internet in here and I have to shake the printer cartridge each time we print something as we can't afford ink at the moment."

In a catch 22, one of the few ways the Air League can raise money is to sell the hall, but to do that would mean the end of the league in Parramatta.

Developers call often, eager to tear down the hall and build more apartment buildings.

Capt Majarian said more apartments were the last thing Parramatta needed and he would fight tooth and nail for more members.

"I tell the developers they can only buy it for \$2 million, that scares them away pretty quick," he said.

Capt Majarian said the Air League helps give children the skills they need to become adults.

"It builds character, respect, teamwork and discipline," he said.

"It's also a lot of fun. It's not just about marching we also teach children about aviation and how to fly planes."

One of his squadron's success stories, Malachi Mashiah, has already taken to the skies thanks to the Air League and is attending the Air League NSW's flying school this month.

At 15-years old, Malachi has dreams of becoming an air force pilot.

"I got to do my training flights," Malachi said.

“I wouldn’t have had the opportunity if it were not for the Air League. It has also made me do better at school as I realised what I needed to achieve to fly in the Australian air force.”