

Bank slugs charity

by JOHN MORCOMBE

A LOCAL charity that feeds homeless people has been told by the Commonwealth Bank it is no longer exempt from bank fees and charges.

The slap in the face for Street Mission was made in the same week as a \$33 million payout to a Commonwealth Bank executive – a fact not lost on the charity.

However, yesterday the bank indicated its directive to Street Mission might have been “an error”.

Street Mission founder Alan Clarke said the charity stocked the emergency food cupboard at the Manly Community Centre, ran a similar operation at Dee Why, where it has a shop recycling donated clothes, and also fed homeless people in Chatswood.

The Office of Charities within the NSW Department of Gaming and Racing confirmed that it recognised Street Mission as a genuine charity with the authority to raise funds.

Last year, Street Mission was given a community service award by the Manly Community Centre, to which it gives about \$1000 a year raised from its shop and from a street stall in Chatswood.

Mr Clarke said Street Mission was granted the exemption by the Commonwealth Bank four years ago and that it saved the charity about \$200 a year.

But a letter received by Mr Clarke this week informed him the bank would no longer waive Street Mission's bank fees and charges.

“After completing a review, your account does not appear to meet our fee exemption requirements,” the letter said.



Which bank is taking money from the homeless . . . Street Mission's Alan Clarke

Picture: MARTIN LANGE

“Therefore, the standard monthly base maintenance and transaction fees will apply to your account from March 3, 2003.”

Mr Clarke said nothing had changed at Street Mission.

“We're even more deserving of the exemption now than we were four

years ago because we're helping more people now than we were back then,” he said.

“You have to wonder about their priorities when they do this to a charity feeding homeless people but give \$33 million to a retiring executive.”

His reference was to the golden handshake given to 42-year-old bank executive Chris Cuffe, who left the bank to take up another job.

“I worked out that it will take 165,000 years for our bank fees to pay off the \$33 million they paid that executive,” Mr Clarke said.

When shown details of its letter to Street Mission yesterday, a bank spokesman said the notice was “probably an error” and would be reviewed. He said the bank had reviewed accounts of organisations which claimed exemptions from fees and found some were not charities.

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