

Case Study: Multiculturalism Changed My Suburb: A Personal Reflection on Salisbury North

Growing up in Salisbury North

My memories of growing up in Salisbury North in the late '80s and '90s were characterised by various social issues, including high rates of vandalism, particularly at the playground across from my home. Many nights, we would hear gatherings of teenagers, the sounds of cars burning out, chains rattling, and wood being ripped apart, only to wake up to a graffitied and vandalised playground the next day. Incidents of antisocial behaviour were frequent, including street harassment and "cat-calling." On one occasion, when I was 12, a man parked beside the phone booth I was using and began to masturbate. Substance abuse among teenagers and early school dropout were common. Criminal activity was also prevalent; a brick was once thrown through our family home's window, yet we considered ourselves fortunate in some way, as ours was the only house on the street that was never broken into. More disturbingly, Salisbury North was the location for high-profile crimes, including unsolved abductions and murders, one of the most well-known being the "bodies in the barrels" murders. Growing up, Salisbury North did not feel safe.

My current experience

Reflecting on Salisbury North today, where my parents still reside, there are undisputable changes, one of the clearest being increased multiculturalism. The social issues I experienced as a teenager seem to have reduced, and the playground, once a focal point for antisocial behaviour, has turned into a community hub where children from diverse backgrounds gather and play. It's common to see children from all sorts of backgrounds playing together. Many are first- or second-generation immigrants or refugees from a wide range of countries like Lebanon, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Sudan, among others. There are three soccer ovals in the precinct that buzz with activity on most days, featuring extremely talented players many who are also first- and second-generation immigrants. These athletes serve as role models to others, including my own children. While some socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities may persist in the area, there are signs that the sense of community has strengthened over time. The suburb *feels* safer. It is worth asking, "Has multiculturalism improved Salisbury North?"



Photo: My children visiting their grandparents in Salisbury North are enriched through opportunities to play with local children and young people – including talented and inspirational football players.

The data shows a rise in multiculturalism in Salisbury North

The rise in multiculturalism is not just my observation. Based on the data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census, approximately 35% of respondents were born overseas, 40% had both parents born overseas, and 10% had one parent born overseas. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders make up 3.6% of the population. It is evident that Salisbury North has become more multicultural over time. The total population increased from 15,632 in 2011 to 18,487 in 2021. More importantly, the number of residents born outside of Australia has increased significantly across various countries. For example, the Afghan population increased from 52 in 2011 to 334 in 2021, and the Indian population increased from 91 in 2011 to 265 in 2021. Similarly, other countries like Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines have also seen an increase in representation. This trend suggests that Salisbury North is becoming increasingly diverse.

Evidence of strengths and improvements from ABS data

While it's difficult to directly attribute improvements in Salisbury North to multiculturalism based solely on the ABS data, some strengths and positive changes in the community can indeed be observed over time through the statistics. These improvements span various occupation categories and show an upward trend in employment, notably in higher-skilled and service-oriented jobs. Specifically:

- There is a noticeable increase in the number of people with higher educational qualifications over the three census periods (2011, 2016, 2021). This trend suggests improved access to education and possibly higher aspirations among residents.
- Overall employment has increased over the years. Full-time employment grew from 4,132 in 2011 to 4,501 in 2021. Part-time employment also saw a rise, from 1,766 in 2011 to 2,604 in 2021. The unemployment rate decreased slightly, from 8.9% in 2011 to 8.5% in 2021. This suggests a slightly healthier job market in 2021 compared to 2011.
- Most residents have lived at the same address as the previous year, indicating low short-term mobility. This number grew from 12,324 in 2011 to 15,157 in 2021. Long-term stability is also evident, with the number of people living at the same address for the past five years going up from 7,607 in 2011 to 10,068 in 2021.
- In terms of occupational categories, *managers* increased from 448 in 2011 to 600 in 2021, *professionals* grew from 477 in 2011 to 682 in 2021, showing a rising trend in higher-skilled jobs.

Suggestions for the Multicultural Framework Review: insights from Salisbury North

Community Spaces: Public spaces such as playgrounds and community centres appear to be an asset in Salisbury North effectively serving as communal gathering points, thereby promoting multicultural interactions and enhancing community cohesion. These require ongoing support and development.

Strength-Based Approaches: The framework aims to "support a cohesive multicultural society and pave the way for a vibrant and prosperous future for all Australians." The example from Salisbury North potentially illustrates how multiculturalism has positively impacted a suburb in Adelaide. Various studies indicate that immigrant populations contribute significantly to Australia's education system and economy. For instance, research on school belonging (students feeling accepted and valued within their school environment) suggests that being a first- or second-generation immigrant serves as a protective factor during high school years (as noted in DeBortoli, 2018). In line with a strength-based approach, the framework could identify and leverage the unique skills, traditions, and cultural assets that different immigrant groups bring to Australia. Creating platforms or initiatives that allow these communities to

share their strengths can serve as a powerful tool for community-building that may benefit broader Australian society.

Emphasising belonging: To cultivate a deeper sense of community, the framework should continue to reinforce elements that contribute to an individual's sense of belonging. This could include facilitating smoother transitions for immigrants and newcomers to areas by providing resources or programs. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on creating opportunities for social interaction and community engagement. Beyond that, the framework could offer avenues for competency and skill-building, empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities, which in turn strengthens their sense of belonging (See Allen et al., 2021 for an integrated framework on building belonging that has been adopted in regions of Canada to welcome newcomers).

Positionality/ Personal Background Information

I am an Associate Professor specialising in belonging research and I am also a board endorsed educational and developmental psychologist at Monash University. I come from a mixed racial background; my biological father was an immigrant who moved to Salisbury, Australia in the 1970s due to a doctor shortage following Cyclone Tracey. I was raised in Salisbury North, a suburb in the northern part of Adelaide by my Mum and Dad who reside there today.

References

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De Bortoli, L. (2018). *PISA Australia in Focus Number 1: Sense of belonging at school*. Australian Council for Educational Research.