Just make it work

"It's not like it used to be." Said an elderly lady on the train last week. I was on my own, traveling home from school and I must admit, I was eavesdropping. The lady was sitting in front of me. I was intrigued, so I listened further. The two elderly friends were reminiscing about the Australia they remembered from their childhood. They recalled those days as being; much happier and must better, because everyone was white.   The first lady told her friend how hard she now finds it, doing her weekly shopping at Hornsby. The unfamiliar languages, clothes and food smells, at her local shopping centre, scare her. She feels afraid and alone in this changing country of hers. She clutched her handbag tightly.
I felt for this Grandma. Multi-culturalism is messy. Can we make it work?

My gaze then shifted across the carriage isle. There was an Indian lady, about my mum's age, dressed in an elegant sari. She was sitting with her little daughter, who had appeared to have just started school. She was keeping her daughter busy, asking her plenty of questions about her day at school. But then I looked a little closer and noticed that the lady was anxious, she could well hear what the elderly ladies were saying and desperately wanted to ensure that her child did not. She felt afraid and alone in this new country of hers. She clutched her child tightly. I felt for this mum, multi-culturalism is messy, we need to make it work.

Australia has one of the most diverse communities on earth. 49% of us, were either born overseas or have a parent that was born overseas. So why do new Australians feel unwelcome? Why do current Australians feel neglected and why are our Indigenous people so often forgotten?

Multi-culturalism is messy. We need to make it work.

My ancestors started coming to Australia nearly 200 years ago. We are Caucasian, Christian and speak English with Australian accents. I have never been a victim of racism. However, my Irish ancestors were tormented. They were poor, desperate and different when they immigrated to Australia. The Australian society at the time referred to the Irish as wild, drunks, unclean, with a dangerous religion.

When my Grandma was a little girl, it was the immigrants from Greece and Italy, who were seen as threats to the Australian way of life. When my parents were little it was Vietnamese and the Lebanese and now it is the Muslims and the people who look like the Indian mum and her daughter.

Multi-culturalism is messy. But its also what makes us the best nation on earth. We just need to make it work.

The Indian lady and her daughter, got off at a station before mine. The lady seemed relieved to escape the elderly chatting ladies. But I felt I should have done something to help them and something to welcome them. But I didn't. I don't yet have an entire plan to 'Just make it work' but I know we can make new Australians feel welcome. We just need the guts to make a start.

So next time I see that mum and that little girl on the train. I'm just going to smile at them and say the little girl, "hi, how was school?"

That seems like a pretty good place to start.