



# Mapping the connections between churches and communities

August 2008

## Overview

NCLS Research is providing user-friendly Community Connections Packs based on customised 2006 Census data to over 7,000 churches from 22 denominations across Australia. A key feature of the pack is data visualisation and mapping.

The Community Connection Packs present Census data about the local community around each church and have been designed specifically to connect a church with its community, in its ministry and mission. NCLS Research's Director, Dr Ruth Powell, has been conducting research on church life for 17 years. Dr Powell says "An NCLS Community Connection Pack contains a customised Profile of each local community showing a range of information like age, education, cultural background, income, and housing that we believe impact ministry decisions churches have to make". "We show what makes each community distinctive and what has changed over time in an easy to understand format."

## Business requirement

NCLS has long seen the value of Census results as an extraordinarily powerful planning tool, however most church leaders don't have the time or expertise to rigorously research data on their local community. "We think the Community Connections Pack can help church leaders more easily understand and connect with their communities by linking research with the practical end of ministry", says Dr Powell. "Data visualisation and mapping are accessible ways that local community leaders can get a full picture of their local community. Presenting data in the form of tables, charts and maps effectively helps people engage with statistics."

## The Solution

In order to produce customised *Community Social Profiles*, each church has been geocoded and categorised as either urban or rural using ABS Section of State classifications. The Community Social Profile then presents statistics for an area around the church, within a 2km radius in urban areas and a 5km radius in rural areas. In some cases this area is customised to be based on parish boundaries.

The local area being mapped is shown throughout the 32 page *Community Social Profile* (Figure 1), in a series of thematic maps, showing topics relevant to church ministries. For example, if a church leader is interested in starting a community play group, they might refer to a map of where concentrations of families with children under 5 live in their local area.

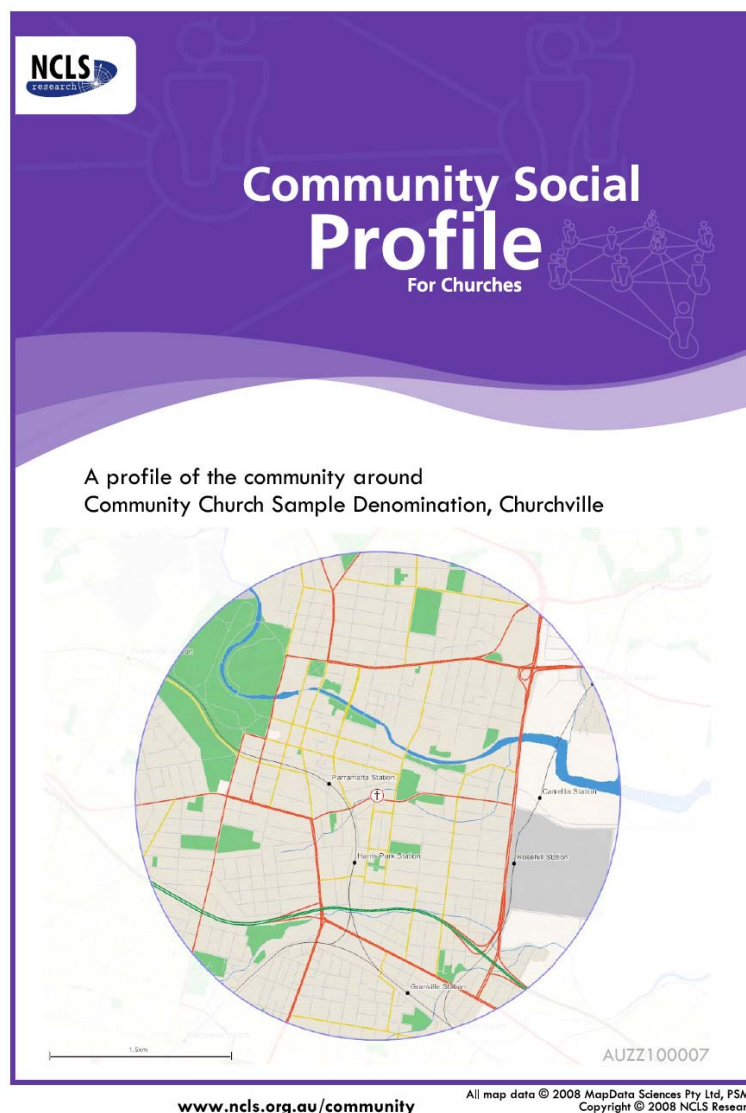


Figure 1

## The Benefit

The base map data, RoadNet Presentation supplied by MapData Sciences Pty Ltd, is essential for contextualising the Census statistics.

*“For the first time, the churches we serve can see the area that we are reporting on. The thematic maps really add value – for example, a church using their pack could provide a youth group to areas with a high density of families with kids under 15”, says Dr Powell (Figure 2).*

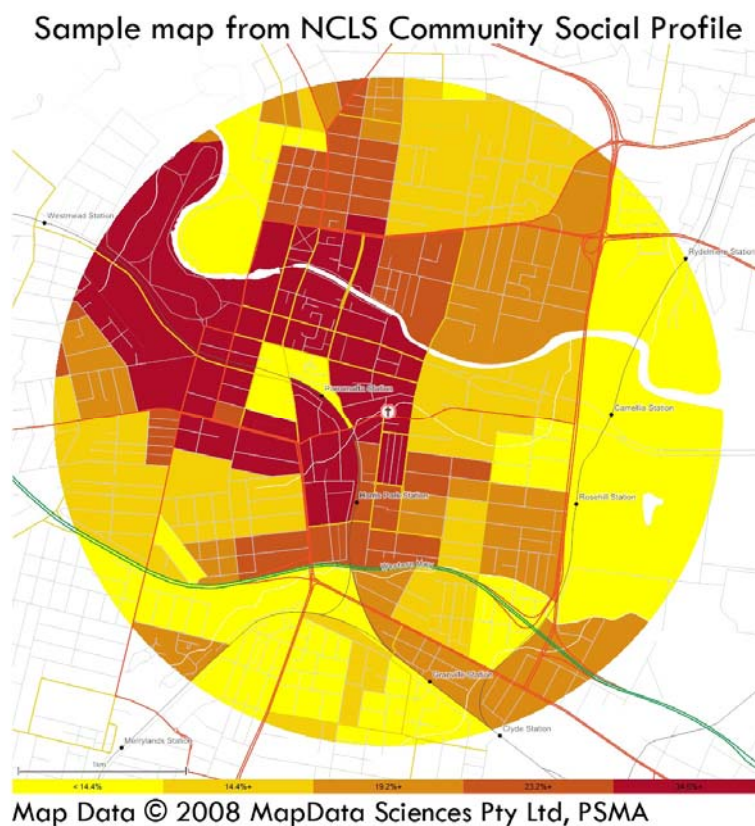


Figure 2

NCLS Research has appreciated the power of GIS for many years and has used it when possible. Dr Powell says the availability of data, software and staff with specific skills in GIS have only recently enabled them to take full advantage of the possibilities of mapping as a research and presentation tool.

*“We do our work on a limited budget compared to commercial operations. We have a talented team, but we are constrained by some of the capital costs involved in establishing a project like this. MapData Sciences and PSMA helped us make the most of what we had and we are very excited about what we’ve been able to do with access to the mapping data they supplied.”*

## **About NCLS Research**

NCLS Research is jointly sponsored by ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, the Uniting Church Board of Mission (NSW & ACT Synod) and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

The mission of NCLS Research is to use credible research to identify signs of hope and nurture life in churches and leadership, as well as encourage the wider community to reflect on its spiritual journey and the churches' place within it.

[www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au)

## **About MapData Sciences Pty Ltd**

For over 10 years MapData Sciences (MDS) has been a leading provider of spatial data, software and services for business mapping solutions in the Australian and New Zealand market place.

Using the quality datasets provided by its source data providers, MDS has a dedicated team of data editors, analysts, geographers and developers engineering the highest quality mapping data and solutions for Australia and New Zealand.

MDS has an ongoing program to add and refine attributes such as road classification, traffic direction, average driving speed, turn restrictions, height and weight restrictions, route numbers, address ranges, and locality/postcode fields. This ensures that it's datasets remain at the high standard which people have come to expect in MDS' quality solutions used for Internet Mapping and Web Services, Business Mapping Data, Consulting Services, Routing, Geocoding, Route Optimisation, Tracking and Display.

[www.mapds.com](http://www.mapds.com)