

Living and working in Balgo, Western Australia

Where is Balgo?

Balgo (Wirrimanu) is one of Australia's most remote Aboriginal communities located in the south-east Kimberley region of Western Australia approximately 1780km north-east of Perth and 900km south-southwest of Darwin (nearest capital city). Halls Creek lies 210km to the east of Balgo. Balgo lies on the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert and on the western edge of the Tanami Desert.

Balgo itself is a site 460 metres above sea level and its climate is tempered accordingly. Temperatures in Balgo range from nine degrees in winter to 45 degrees celcius in summer. The average annual rainfall is 315mm, most of which falls in the months of December to March.

About the community

Balgo is in the Shire of Halls Creek with a population of about 460 people. Most of the Balgo community speaks Kukatja, which is one of the Western Desert languages. Most of the adults (except the elderly) also have sufficient command of English to communicate with non-Aboriginals. Other languages spoken include Walmajarri, Jaru, Pintupi, Warlpiri and Kriol. The Kukatja name for the locality of the Balgo Township is Wirrimanu.

People have access to general services in Balgo including an Administration Office (Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation), Balgo Clinic (with Flying Doctor Service) and Palyalatju Maparnpa Health Committee and a general Store (Outback Stores). The Catholic Church (Kutjungka Catholic Parish) is a prominent establishment within the community which also operates the Catholic primary school (Luurnpa). Young local people in the community also have access to developing their skills through the community Trade Training Centre. Balgo is a "dry" community and alcohol is not permitted.

Balgo is also home to the world-renown Warlayirti Art Centre. Balgo art first appeared in the 1970s with the introduction of canvas and paint by Catholic missionaries. Today, Balgo art is renowned for its energy, diversity, innovation and vibrant colours; many of its artists are internationally acclaimed.

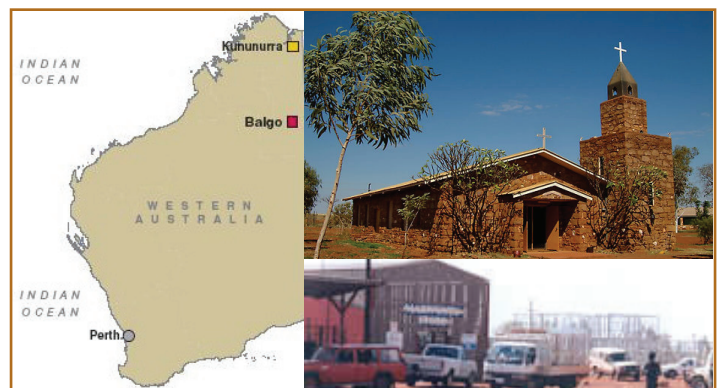
What is it like to work for the Department for Child Protection in Balgo?

Despite being 3.5 hours from the Halls Creek office, Wendy (Snr Community Child Protection Worker) says that the team is very supportive. Wendy is in contact with her team on a daily basis and is visited by CPFS case managers and other staff at least once a month. Housing is very comfortable and there is always a way to wind down, whether it's swimming at Lake Gregory with inter-agency colleagues or driving to Halls Creek for a day trip. Wendy says that being an Aboriginal person herself it is rewarding to work with a community that continues to practice local culture and tradition.

Given the remoteness of Balgo, as a CPFS worker building strong relationships is essential. Lynette (previously Snr CCPW) developed great relationships with the local women who taught her about local food gathering practices and native plantation during her weekends. Carla (previously Team Leader) says *"the collegiate support and interagency relationships were very strong and the community in Balgo is a very unique and positive community."*

Housing

Subsidised housing through the Government Regional Officers' Housing (GROH) may be provided to employees and their families.



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What is it like to live in Roebourne?

Due to Roebourne's northerly location, the weather is of a tropical nature. Summer is characterised by hot days (it frequently has the highest maximum in the state) and heavy rainfall (which is uncommon) whereas winter is significantly cooler with little to no rainfall. The mean maximum temperature for the year is 33.9 °C and the mean minimum is 20.5 °C, with rainfall averaging 310.3 mm for the year. As listed above, there are many services provided to the town of Roebourne, supporting a healthy lifestyle for families and individuals. Roebourne has excellent sporting facilities for a town of 950 people including recently constructed covered basketball courts and a public swimming pool. Additional to these services, Roebourne serves as the gateway to many national parks in the interior which is a great opportunity for families and individuals alike to see the great sights of the Pilbara, including Karijini and Millstream National Parks. Most locals would say the lifestyle in Roebourne is great; very relaxed and friendly. Nothing can beat relaxing in the sunny, warm weather with such a great landscape in sight. One departmental officer Sally says that "Roebourne is the place where I feel most at home. I love the town, its history, the people, and the fact that it is central to towns like Karratha (shopping), with Samson and Cossack (fishing) just a short drive away. I also love the countryside around here, and go bush regularly."

For more information about Roebourne, visit the shire website at: www.roebourne.wa.gov.au

Relocation and the housing

Housing is subsidised through the Government Regional Officers' Housing (GROH). The Department is able to provide assistance with relocation expenses in some instances.

You are also entitled to air-conditioning subsidy from October till April each year, along with other general allowances.

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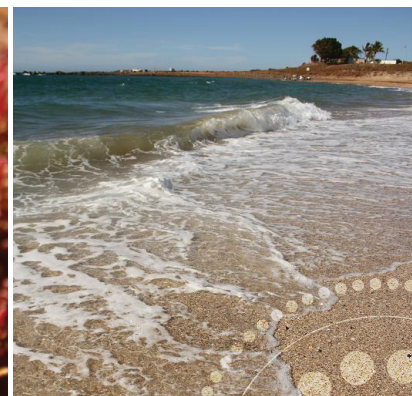
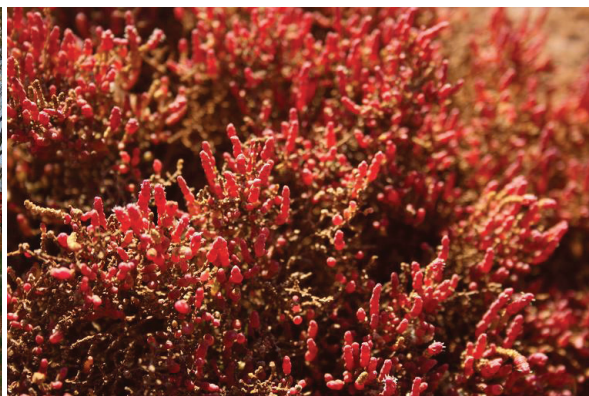
Most departmental workers would agree that working in the Roebourne Department for Child Protection and Family Support office is dynamic. Due to Roebourne's semi-remote location and the fact that most workers are away from their friends and family, the office is filled with feelings of teamwork, support and encouragement. The office is extremely welcoming to new staff not only as workers, but as community members. There is a general feeling among the team in Roebourne that relationships are of the utmost importance in our work, because through these channels we can make a difference in the community.

Sarah (team leader) says, "we are a small team who is committed to improving the lives of the people we work with. I am often proud of the proactive work our team are committed to in working alongside families to improve their lives."

Sally (CCPW) says, "working in the community I live in is great. This year, hopefully, will see me getting more proactive within the community, liaising more with other agencies and the community itself, to work towards creating a safer, happier community for our kids."

Leah (manager of a local hostel) says that "when I first got here, I had some really great people who showed me around town. The families I have worked alongside of have been able to show me the right way, and I have gained a great deal of respect for them in allowing me into their lives."

Hayley (case support worker) says that "Roebourne is a great place to work because there is such a great diversity of people. Everyone in the office and community is continually working with each other and learning from one and other, in the aim of creating a brighter future for our kids. I am so proud to be a part of working toward this common goal, to make this community a better place."



For further information on employment opportunities with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, please visit www.jobs.wa.gov.au or www.childprotection.wa.gov.au.