

# An Aging Japanese Village Put Life-Sized Dolls Everywhere to Feel More Alive

There are fewer than 60 residents living in the tiny Japanese village of Ichinono. Most of them are elderly, which is not surprising: Japan has the second-oldest population on earth. Kids born in the tiny village eventually went to college in big cities, found jobs elsewhere, and never returned.



So, to make the city feel vibrant again, residents have crafted crude life-sized dolls and stationed them around town to liven up the joint.

Townpeople took it upon themselves to create mannequins that they wrapped in old clothing and positioned them at various points around town to make it seem like the “residents” were collecting firewood, swinging from a swing set, or riding bikes.

30 percent of Japan’s total population is over 65 years old—that’s the highest percentage of people over 65 in one country in the world. People are dying at a faster rate than they can be replaced with new babies.

In Ichinono, the village leader, warns that if something isn’t done, entire villages are at risk of extinction. The Prime Minister has pledged to revitalize small aging villages, but so far there hasn’t been much that’s proven to work. In 2023, the Japanese government started

offering residents around \$7,700 US per child to couples in major cities who have children who are 18 years and younger so they can move into the less populated countryside.

All that is to say that the country can use a little bit of youth. And when real flesh and blood people aren't having enough babies, life-size dolls are the next best thing.

But there is a shining ray of hope in the village—a 2-year-old, the first baby the village had seen in two decades. His parents moved into town from Osaka during the pandemic to get away from the bustling and congested city life. They've been there ever since. The 2 year-old doesn't have many kids to play with, not real ones anyway. But let's hope one day, a younger couple with kids moves to town so he can socialize with someone his own age.