

# Virtual online spaces help social recluses in Japan

## Vocabulary Match

recluses ● virtual ● consultation ● avatars ● stereotype ● independence ●

● self-reliance ● digital characters ● online ● preconception ● advice ● loners

## Article

Virtual online spaces are helping social recluses in Japan stay connected to the world and make a full return to society. Local governments and private companies are offering consultation support, work-from-home jobs, and unique club activities based on common interests. The Kyoto prefectural government has held virtual meetups for shut-ins since June 2022, where avatars gather at a table surrounded by trees.

The virtual community is managed by Kizuki, an operator of cram schools for troubled children. Participants chat about their favorite foods, the weather, and watch live video games on YouTube. The virtual community currently has a small group of participants, ranging from preteens to those in their 40s, and is easy to join.

The Kanagawa prefectural government is planning to host a similar virtual space for social recluses in fiscal 2023. Tokyoite Kunio Yamada launched an employment service called "Comoly" in 2020, offering in-home work and a wide variety of activities, including online club activities. Yamada thinks that the stereotype of "independence equals employment" is what pushes shut-ins further away from society.

## Quiz

1. What are local governments and private companies offering to social recluses in Japan?
2. What do participants chat about in the virtual community?

## Conversation

- A: Hi! I just joined this virtual world. How's it treating you?  
B: Ohh, you're in for a treat! Just exploring and meeting new pixel pals.  
A: Haha, nice! I've been a homebody for ages, so this is a game changer.  
B: Tell me about it! Who needs IRL when you can socialize from your sofa?  
A: Exactly! It's like an introvert's paradise, with friends just a click away.  
B: You got it! Let's be buddies and rule this digital universe together!

## Discussion

1. What are some other ways that people can connect with others who have similar interests?
2. What are some of your favorite games, TV shows or foods to chat about with others?