

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Spinning New Beginnings for the Disco Generation

The Disco Generation
Special Lesson at IDPS,
Japan¹

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Japan is the world's most aged society. 29.3% of its population are aged 65 and above in 2024 and this share is projected to rise to approximately 34.8% by 2040.² Beyond the challenges of healthcare and pension sustainability, population ageing in Japan has brought a quieter but equally pressing concern: social isolation. In the first half of 2024, the National Police Agency reported that 37,227 individuals living alone were found dead at home, with over 70% of them aged 65 and above.³ This phenomenon, known in Japanese as *kodokushi* (lonely death), underscores the urgency of creating opportunities for older adults to remain socially connected and engaged.

Recreation and leisure activities play a key role in supporting active ageing. Among various types of recreation, music has received growing scholarly attention for its benefits to older adults. A 2023 evidence map reviewing 67 systematic reviews on music interventions for older

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

² Tochibayashi, N. (2025, September 15). *How Japan's longevity economy is creating new opportunities*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/09/japans-longevity-economy/>

³ Khalil, H. (2024, August 30). *Japan: Nearly 4,000 people found more than month after dying alone, report says*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwyx6wwp5d5o>

adults found positive health outcomes, including improvements in cognition and quality of life.⁴ A 2024 scoping review further highlighted that musical participation, such as active engagement like making music, can support emotional wellbeing, social connection, and a sense of purpose in later life.⁵

The Disco Generation Special Lesson

The International DJ & Production School (IDPS) was established in September 2011 in Tokyo. The school offered one-to-one instruction by active professional DJs, covering a range of courses from beginner DJ skills to advanced music production. An Osaka campus opened in April 2016. The Tokyo campus later closed during the COVID-19, and IDPS now operates from Osaka under the name IDPS OSAKA.⁶

IDPS adopts an age-inclusive principle. Students range from five years old to people in their late 60s, and it produced two Guinness World Record holders at opposite ends of the age spectrum: DJ Chocolateboy, the world's youngest club

DJ at age five, and DJ Sumirock, the world's oldest professional club DJ at age 83 (Figure 1).⁷ These achievements show that DJing could be made accessible across the lifespan.



Figure 1. DJ Sumirock

Image source: Guinness World Records⁸

Recognising this potential, IDPS developed the Disco Generation Special Lesson (ディスコ世代向け特別レッスン), a DJ course designed specifically for older-aged people with no prior experience (Figure 2). The course tapped into a specific cultural memory. During the country's economic boom of the late 1970s-1980s, disco and nightclub culture became popular. Iconic venues such as Maharaja, Juliana's Tokyo, and many discothèques in Roppongi and Shinjuku became central to the nightlife experience of a generation.⁹ This era, intertwined

⁴ Ma, G., & Ma, X. (2023). Music Intervention for older adults: Evidence Map of Systematic Reviews. *Medicine*, 102(48), e36016.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/MD.00000000000036016>

⁵ Siltainsuu, H., & Peltola, H.-R. (2024). Music as Support for Older Adults' Wellbeing: A Scoping Review. *Music & Science*, 7, 20592043241268721.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20592043241268721>

⁶ IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *About*. IDPS. Retrieved 7 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/about>

⁷ IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *About*. IDPS. Retrieved 7 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/about>

⁸ Senda, M. (2018, September 5). *Rocking the floor at 83: This Japanese woman is now the world's oldest*

professional club DJ. Guinness World Records.

<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2018/9/rocking-the-floor-at-83-this-japanese-woman-is-now-the-worlds-oldest-profession-538416.html>

⁹ Disco's back: Japan grooves to bubble beat for Heisei era sayonara. (2019, May 1). *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/discos-back-japan-grooves-to-bubble-beat-for-heisei-era-sayonara>; Oto, W. (2025, July 7). Tokyo's Lost Showa-Era Nightlife Club Scene.

Tokyo Weekender.

https://www.tokyoweekender.com/art_and_culture/history/tokyos-lost-showa-era-nightlife-scene/

with the rise of city pop, a Japanese genre blending funk, disco, and soft rock, left a deep nostalgic memory on those who came of age during the bubble economy. Today, many of those who frequented these venues in their youth are in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. According to a survey conducted by Halmek Institute for Well-being, 58.8% of respondents aged 50 to 68 said they had been to a disco.¹⁰ The Disco Generation Special Lesson offered them a way to reconnect with the music of their formative years, not as passive listeners but as active performers, while acquiring new digital skills in the process.



Figure 2. The Disco Generation Special Lesson music collection

Image source: IDPS OSAKA¹¹

The course was designed with accessibility at its core. It uses the Pioneer DDJ-WeGO4, a portable controller that connects to a computer or smartphone. A key feature is the built-in SYNC function, which automatically aligns the beats of two tracks, allowing older adults who are complete beginners to start mixing tracks from their very first lesson. Participants could use music stored on their

¹⁰ 「興奮しすぎて入れ歯が飛ばないようにね (笑)」高齢者をノラせる“ディスコ”が老人ホームに主催DJが語る狙い. (2026, March 29). ライブドアニュース.

<https://news.livedoor.com/article/detail/30866016/>

¹¹ IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Special lessons for the disco generation*. Retrieved 7 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/disco>

smartphones or computers, or stream from Spotify (Figure 3). IDPS provides guidance on all necessary software setup.



Figure 3. The necessary software for the lesson

Image source: IDPS OSAKA¹²

The curriculum covered the fundamentals of DJ performance: cue-point technique, understanding song structure, the basics of mixing, and the art of storytelling through track selection. It also addressed a challenge specific to the target audience: many 1970s disco songs were recorded by live bands, resulting in slight tempo fluctuations that make beat-matching harder than with contemporary dance music. Instructors teach techniques to navigate these irregularities.

Two course tiers are available. The DJ Experience Course includes a WeGO4 controller and four hours of lessons at a one-off price of JPY39,900, designed for casual use at home parties or small bars.¹³ The Beginner Course offers training on professional CDJ equipment at JPY27,900 per month.¹⁴ In both cases, participants

¹² IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Special lessons for the disco generation*. Retrieved 7 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/disco>

¹³ IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Tokyo Campus Course List*. IDPS. Retrieved 8 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/tokyo-dj-school>

¹⁴ IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Tokyo Campus Course List*. IDPS. Retrieved 8 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/tokyo-dj-school>

could record their mixes and save them on their phones, giving them a tangible creative output to keep and share. DJ Sumirock is one of the older students who turned DJing into an occupation (Box 1).

Box 1: DJ Sumirock: the world's oldest professional club DJ

Sumiko Iwamura (DJ Sumirock) runs a Chinese dumpling restaurant by day and performs as a DJ by night. Her journey into DJing began at age 77, when a friend organised a techno party at her restaurant and suggested she try it herself. She then enrolled at IDPS Tokyo, and within a few years was performing regularly at a nightclub in Shinjuku. In 2018, at 83 years and 118 days old, she was certified by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest professional club DJ. Her sets blend techno, jazz, French chanson, and anime soundtracks. She has performed internationally in Paris and New Zealand, and was featured in Netflix's *Midnight Asia: Eat · Dance · Dream* (2022).

DJ Sumirock is often cited as an example of late-life reinvention. However, it is worth noting that she is an exceptional case: a person with strong intrinsic motivation, and the physical stamina to maintain two occupations. It should not be taken as representative of what most older adults can or wish to achieve through DJ-based recreation. The goal of the Disco Generation Special Lesson is to enable older adults to enjoy music-making in everyday settings, which is a more replicable and relevant outcome.

Source: Senda, M. (2018, September 5). *Rocking the floor at 83: This Japanese woman is now the world's oldest professional club DJ*. Guinness World Records. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2018/9/rocking-the-floor-at-83-this-japanese-woman-is-now-the-worlds-oldest-profession-538416.html>

What Works and What Does Not

Several features of the course design lower the barriers to participation, especially for older students. The choice of the WeGO4 controller was deliberate: it is portable, and it reduces the technically demanding aspect of DJing. The use of personal music libraries and streaming services means that participants could play songs they already knew and loved, making the learning experience immediately rewarding. Nostalgia served as a powerful motivational hook. Rather than asking participants to learn an unfamiliar skill, the course invited them to revisit the music of their youth and take on a new creative role in relation to it. Research on music and wellbeing supports this approach that nostalgic music has been shown to evoke positive emotions, strengthen a sense of identity, and foster social connectedness and self-esteem among older adults.¹⁵ The one-to-one instruction allows each student to progress at their own pace.

The benefits for older students are both practical and social. DJing provides a creative outlet, introduces new digital skills, and offers a form of social engagement through performance and shared musical taste. The skills could be practised and performed in a variety of

¹⁵ Sedikides, C., Leunissen, J., & Wildschut, T. (2022). The psychological benefits of music-

evoked nostalgia. *Psychology of Music*, 50(6), 2044–2062. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356211064641>

settings, from homes and community spaces to clubs and care facilities, well suited to dense environments like Tokyo where dedicated recreational space is limited.¹⁶ IDPS extended these benefits further through its Gift mental care outreach programme, which brought DJ-based music sessions into nursing homes (Box 2).

Box 2: Gift: DJ-based mental care in nursing homes

Beyond recreational courses, IDPS operates a mental care outreach division named Gift: A New Music Experience (Gift ～新しい音楽体験～). Through this programme, IDPS instructors visit elderly care facilities to provide DJ-based music sessions for residents.

The programme was piloted at SOMPO ケアラヴィーレ相模原 (SOMPO Care Lavière Sagamihara), a nursing home operated by SOMPO Japan, where it received a positive response. The idea is that music transcends language and physical limitations. Even those who cannot dance can participate through hand-clapping or gentle body movement. Performing as a DJ can give residents a sense of achievement, purpose, and social connection.



¹⁶ Creech, A. (2019). Using Music Technology Creatively to Enrich Later-Life: A Literature

The longer-term goal is to teach some residents basic DJ skills so that care facilities can organise their own in-house events. This initiative reflects a broader emerging trend in Japan, where DJs with care work qualifications are organising “silver disco” events at elderly care facilities to promote social engagement and combat isolation. However, no published evaluation of the Gift programme outcomes is available yet.



Source: IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Gift*. IDPS. Retrieved 8 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/dj-%e3%82%92%e4%bd%bf%e3%81%a3%e3%81%9f%e3%83%a1%e3%83%b3%e3%82%bf%e3%83%ab%e3%83%97%e3%83%ad%e3%82%b0%e3%83%a9%e3%83%a0>

However, there are several limitations that need consideration. First, the question of accessibility. The course costs are significant sums for older adults. Unlike publicly funded senior education programmes in Japan, the IDPS courses are entirely privately run and market priced. This raises the question of who actually benefited. The course was likely more accessible to middle-income older adults with both the financial means and

Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00117>

the cultural disposition to engage with nightlife-associated activities. Lower-income older adults, and those from more conservative social backgrounds, may have been excluded.

Second, the course requires a baseline level of digital literacy. Participants need to use a laptop or smartphone, navigate streaming platforms, and manage audio software. For older adults who are already comfortable with these tools, the learning curve is manageable. But for those who are not, especially people in their 70s and above, the prerequisite skills may create a barrier. The course materials and marketing are oriented towards the 40s and 50s age group, suggesting that IDPS may not have intended to reach the older segments of the population, where the risks of social isolation are greater.

Third, the sustainability of the model is uncertain. The course exists as a commercial offering by a private DJ school, not as a community programme. This makes it vulnerable to the market pressures that affect any small business. It also means that no systematic data on participant outcomes, retention, or satisfaction appears to have been collected or published. Without such evidence, it is difficult to assess the actual impact. The Gift outreach programme in nursing homes is a promising extension to communities. And in 2026, similar DJ events were replicated in other nursing homes in Japan.¹⁷ Yet, the outcomes of

such events still lack published evaluation data.



Figure 4. DJ events at the nursing home Aobadai Sakuraen

Image source: ライブドアニュース¹⁸

Conclusion

Despite the above limitations, the IDPS case offers a useful example for those involved in designing recreational programmes for older adults. It demonstrates that there is latent demand for creative, technology-mediated activities that go beyond conventional offerings. The disco generation's willingness to engage with DJing suggests that cultural resonance and personal biography matter in programme design. Activities that connect to people's life histories and identities may be more effective in motivating engagement than generic offerings. When translating these insights into future creative, music-based recreation programmes, it is important to ensure programmes are affordable, sustainable, and accessible to a broader range of older adults. This may require public investment, community

¹⁷ 「興奮しすぎて入れ歯が飛ばないようにね (笑)」高齢者をノらせる“ディスコ”が老人ホームに主催DJが語る狙い. (2026, March 29). ライブドアニュース.

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¹⁸ 「興奮しすぎて入れ歯が飛ばないようにね (笑)」高齢者をノらせる“ディスコ”が老人ホームに主催DJが語る狙い. (2026, March 29). ライブドアニュース.

<https://news.livedoor.com/article/detail/30866016/>

partnerships, and willingness to integrate non-traditional activities into mainstream active ageing programmes.

Sources:

IDPS OSAKA. (n.d.). *Special lessons for the disco generation*. Retrieved 7 April 2026, from <https://idpsorg.com/disco>

Disco's back: Japan grooves to bubble beat for Heisei era sayonara. (2019, May 1). *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/discos-back-japan-grooves-to-bubble-beat-for-heisei-era-sayonara>

Siltainsuu, H., & Peltola, H.-R. (2024). Music as Support for Older Adults' Wellbeing: A Scoping Review. *Music & Science*, 7, 20592043241268721. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20592043241268721>

Midnight Asia: Eat · Dance · Dream. (n.d.). Netflix. Retrieved 8 April 2026, from <https://www.netflix.com/sg/title/81134160>

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