NEWS LESSON

In Japan, You Can Hire a Grandmother



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What practical skill would you like an older person to teach you?
2. Can someone feel like family without being related?
3. Would you ask for advice from someone with a very different life?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**customers**	☐	A	people who buy a product or a service
2	**ageing**	☐	B	people whose job is to look after others
3	**population**	☐	C	people who write news stories
4	**genuinely**	☐	D	getting older, with more old people in the country
5	**journalists**	☐	E	all the people who live in a place
6	**carers**	☐	F	what you know about a subject
7	**knowledge**	☐	G	really, in a true way
8	**activity**	☐	H	something you do, often with other people

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A company sends older women to cook, tidy, teach a skill or simply spend time with somebody. The service started in 2011.

1 What if you could hire a grandmother for an afternoon? In Japan, there is a real service that lets people do something very similar. Customers can ask an older woman to cook a meal, help organise their home, teach them a skill or simply spend time with them.

2 The service is called OK! Obaachan, which means something like "OK! Grandma". It started in 2011 and is run by a company called Client Partners. Not every worker is actually a grandmother, and the service is not only for people who feel lonely. Some customers just need practical help with a job they cannot manage on their own, and they want someone patient who has done it many times before.

3 One woman working for the service, Taeko Kaji, was 69 when she spoke to Australian journalists in 2025. She said she enjoyed going to different places and trying new experiences. For older workers, a job like this can bring in money, fill the day with activity and give them a chance to meet new people.

4 Japan has an ageing population, which means there are a lot of older people compared with younger ones, and many of them live alone. Some families also live far away from one another, so it is not easy to drop in for an hour. In this situation, a service that brings the generations together may be genuinely useful. A younger person can pick up a skill from somebody with years of experience, while the older worker may enjoy feeling needed again.

5 However, money changes the relationship. A paid visitor is doing a job, even if they are kind and friendly, and the visit ends when the time is up. It is important to be clear about what the service offers. Hiring somebody for company is not the same as having a family member who has known you all your life.

6 The idea may sound strange at first, but people already pay teachers, carers and guides for their knowledge and their time. Perhaps the most interesting question is not why anyone would hire a grandmother. It is why spending time with older people has become so difficult to arrange.

Sources: ABC Australia. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The service began in 2011. T F NG
2. The service is the largest of its kind in Japan. T F NG
3. Every worker in the service is a real grandmother. T F NG
4. Taeko Kaji was 69 when she spoke to journalists in 2025. T F NG
5. It is easy for families who live far away to drop in for an hour. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

advice	generations	manage	organise	practical	relationship	skill

1. Can you help me _____ my papers into neat piles?
2. The box is heavy, and I can't _____ it on my own.
3. A plumber gives _____ help, not just advice.
4. In some homes, three _____ live together: children, parents and grandparents.
5. A good _____ with your neighbours makes life easier.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The service _____ OK! Obaachan. (CALL)
2. It _____ in 2011 and is run by a company called Client Partners. (START)
3. Taeko Kaji _____ to Australian journalists in 2025. (SPEAK)
4. She said she enjoyed _____ to different places and trying new experiences. (GO)
5. Customers can ask an older woman _____ a meal. (COOK)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A phrasal verb is a verb plus a small word such as up or out. The small word changes the meaning, so learn the two words together.

after away off on out through up

1. Her granddaughter looks _____ her when she is ill.
2. Can you help me find _____ when the next bus leaves?
3. Please carry _____ with your story; I'm listening.
4. He was born in Osaka, but he grew _____ in Tokyo.
5. Please turn _____ the oven; it is too hot in here.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What could make paid help feel warm without pretending it was family?
2. Which kinds of experience become more valuable with age?
3. What could different generations enjoy doing together?

9 Role-play: should we hire a grandmother?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the daughter

Your father lives alone and you live far away. You want to book a paid visitor from a service like OK! Obaachan for two hours a week. Explain why it could help, listen to his worries and try to agree a plan.

Student B · the father

You're proud and independent. You think paid company is strange, and you'd rather see your family. Say what worries you. You can say no, or agree to try it if the conditions are right.

Useful phrases

I'm worried you're on your own too much.

It's only a trial, so we could try it once.

I don't want a stranger in my house.

She'd help with the cooking, and she'd be good company.

I'd rather see you than pay someone.

Let's try it for a month and see how it goes.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the father agree, and what changed his mind?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 D · 3 E · 4 G · 5 C · 6 B · 7 F · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 NG · 3 F · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 organise · 2 manage · 3 practical · 4 generations · 5 relationship

6 Verb forms

1 is called · 2 started · 3 spoke · 4 going · 5 to cook

7 Language focus

1 after · 2 out · 3 on · 4 up · 5 off

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