

# BELOVED COMMUNITY NEWS

Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI) at Asbury Methodist Village (AMV)

## What is GBCI?

The Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI) is a nonprofit founded by Asbury Methodist Village (AMV) residents that nurtures intergenerational relationships and promotes social justice through programs with youth, families, and older adults in the city of Gaithersburg. GBCI's goal is to realize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a "Beloved Community," where individuals from diverse backgrounds can have equal opportunities to live healthy, fulfilling lives. Our volunteer-led programs cover early education literacy and art programs, mentorship, English conversation classes, and more. Together, we collaborate with residents at Asbury, community partners, and passionate individuals in Gaithersburg to create better outcomes for marginalized communities. GBCI's offices are located at Asbury Methodist Village.



*Above Photo: Fran Vargas, GBCI English Conversation Volunteer, teaches two participants English language skills.*

***"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?"***

***— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.***

## Showing Up: The Volunteers Who Make GBCI Possible

*Written by: Constance Teage & Anne Ellestad*

GBCI has always been a volunteer-led organization. From its founding, volunteers have shown up to help shape the direction of GBCI's work, build its programs, and lead alongside staff at every level. That is still true today. Volunteers are part of this organization's leadership, and the work that happens every week across every program happens because they choose to show up.



*Above Photo: GBCI volunteers gather at our June Monthly Meeting, where we celebrated their dedication and impact.*

Across all GBCI programs, volunteers are present. They sing with toddlers in Early Steps, helping children take their first steps toward literacy while their parents learn alongside them. They help teach adult English learners one-on-one and in small groups in the English Conversation Group, building not just language skills but genuine friendships across cultures. They mentor elementary, middle, and high

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school students, showing up week after week as a trusted, caring presence in young people's lives. They host the Intergenerational Book Club, bringing older adults and high school students together around a shared story. They drive across Gaithersburg, delivering groceries to families who rely on the biweekly food supplement. They sit beside newly arrived Afghan families, helping with paperwork, connecting them to jobs, and navigating systems that are unfamiliar and often overwhelming. They stand alongside neighbors at city council meetings, organize tenants, advocate for affordable housing, and work in our local neighborhood to ensure that families in this community have what they need to thrive.

*"I feel more connected to my community than I ever have." — A GBCI Volunteer*



**Above Photo:** GBCI volunteers' cars lined up at Epworth in November 2025 to collect food boxes for delivery to Cider Mill Apartments ahead of Thanksgiving.

This breadth is not accidental. It reflects something GBCI has always believed: that the needs of a community are interconnected, and the people willing to meet those needs are its greatest resource. Over fifteen years, GBCI has engaged more than 1,400 volunteers. They come from Asbury Methodist Village and from the wider Gaithersburg community. They are retired educators, engineers, social workers, artists, advocates, students, and neighbors who simply decide to show up.

And they keep showing up. When we surveyed volunteers across our Early Steps, English Conversation, and Mentoring programs this spring, over 90 percent were excited to return in the fall. Not because they were asked to, but because something happens when they volunteer that they do not find anywhere else. They describe it as meaning, connection, joy, and family.

*"I have learned so much about these families: their resilience, their determination. They inspire me as much as I hope to inspire them." — A Mentoring Volunteer*

That is the part that often surprises people before they volunteer. They expect to give but end up receiving even more: a deeper understanding of their neighbors, a renewed sense of purpose, and relationships that enrich their lives in ways they did not anticipate.

**To every GBCI volunteer, past and present:** *thank you for showing up, for caring, and for making this community more beloved. The time you've given has changed lives all across this community. We couldn't do this without you.*

If you are interested in joining GBCI's volunteer community, don't hesitate to get in touch with Anne Ellestad at [anne@gaithersburgbelovedcommunity.org](mailto:anne@gaithersburgbelovedcommunity.org).



**Above Photo:** Kris Martin, a GBCI volunteer with a student during our Wednesday Mentoring Session in June 2026.

THANK YOU!

# GBCI's FACES OF SERVICE



**Above Photo:** Fran Vargas is with English Conversation Class students participating a mock supermarket activity designed to teach students the English vocabulary needed to shop for food.

## **Fran Vargas:** *English Conversation Group Volunteer*

Some people talk about giving back. Fran Vargas simply does it and has been doing it since she was a teenager. After a distinguished career spanning social work, child welfare, employment training, and twenty years supervising volunteers in an AIDS service organization in New York, Fran arrived at Asbury Methodist Village two years ago and wasted no time finding her next way to contribute to her community. That is just who she is. When Fran heard about GBCI's English Conversation Program, she did not hesitate.

She joined in the fall of 2024 and has shown up faithfully ever since, arriving half an hour early each week to help set up tables and chairs and review the lesson before the students walk through the door. Over the past year, she has worked with two very different learners: a young mother with a second-grade education in Spanish who was learning to read and speak English at the same time, and a woman in her seventies, working toward her U.S. citizenship. Each one called on different skills, and Fran met each of them exactly where they were. That kind of attentiveness, the willingness to adapt and learn alongside her student, is a gift that cannot be taught.

One moment captures the heart of what Fran does. After weeks of practice, her first student sang the English alphabet to her nursing daughter, right there in class. "It took several sessions for her to get it," Fran recalls, "and she did it while parenting at the same time." That is the kind of breakthrough that happens because someone like Fran kept showing up.

In 2025, she extended her service even further, joining GBCI's food distribution team and delivering groceries to fifty families at Cider Mill on a biweekly basis. Two programs. Two forms of service. The same generous, unwavering spirit behind both.

When asked what motivates her to keep coming back, Fran speaks with conviction: "I know that it is appreciated by the students and staff. I continue to grow and learn. I get to continue to contribute even though I am no longer working full-time in my chosen career."

Fran, we do not take lightly what you bring to this community. Your experience, your dedication, your patience, and your warmth have touched lives in ways that will ripple far beyond a single classroom or a single delivery. Thank you for showing up, week after week, and for embodying everything a Beloved Community can be.

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For more information:

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## Announcements

### Keese School Presents: How Two Generations Have Shaped Social Change

*A Conversation Between a Baby Boomer and a Gen Z Leader: Hosted by Rollie Smith*



GBCI invites you to an inspiring evening at the Keese School, as Spence Limbocker and Kate Barranco reflect on what two generations have learned from each other about civic action, social change, and the values that shape our world. Together, they will share what divided them, what surprised them, and what gives them hope for the future.

**Monday, September 21st, 2026, at 7:30 – Rosborough Theatre, 301 Odenhal Avenue, Gaithersburg, MD 20877**

4TH ANNUAL  
**GBCI COMMUNITY DAY**  
IN COLLABORATION WITH ASBURY'S 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19**  
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
Rosborough Overflow Parking Lot  
Asbury Methodist Village  
301 Odendhal Ave  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877





**Join us for a Day of Food, Music, and Family Activities!**

Please Register with  
QR code or link below

<https://forms.gle/i2E8MRAHPBBYezpt9>

Note: In case of rain, all activities will be moved indoors to the rooms surrounding the Hefner Auditorium.

For more info contact GBCI: 301-216-4090




### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

GBCI is seeking volunteer mentors for our after-school and early learning programs

**TUESDAY** Literacy Mentoring  
Gaithersburg Elementary 3rd-5th grade **3:00-5:00 PM**

**WEDNESDAY** Elementary Mentoring  
South Lake Elementary 1st-2nd grade **3:00-5:00 PM**

**THURSDAY** Mentoring through Creative Expression  
Gaithersburg Elementary & Middle School 5th-8th grade **3:00-5:00 PM**

**WEDNESDAY** Early Steps  
Asbury Methodist Village Ages 0-5, with parents **9:30-10:45 AM**

**No experience needed, just a caring heart.**

Interested? Contact Sarahi Segura, Program Manager | (301) 987-4849

[sarahi@gaitersburgbelovedcommunity.org](mailto:sarahi@gaitersburgbelovedcommunity.org)

## UPCOMING EVENTS!

 Tuesday, August 25th, 2026, 10:00 – 11:00 AM – **Mentoring Program Orientation**, Wallace Community Room  
*\*Mentors only need to attend one of the Mentoring Program Orientations*

 Wednesday, September 9th, 2026, 10:00 – 11:00 AM – **2nd Mentoring Program Orientation**, Wallace Community Room  
*\*Mentors only need to attend one of the Mentoring Program Orientations*

 Friday, September 11th, 2026, 10:00 – 11:00 AM, **September Monthly Meeting: Program Kickoff**, Hefner Auditorium, Asbury Methodist Village