

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 that nurtures intergenerational relationships and promotes social justice through programs with youth, families, and older adults in the city of Gaithersburg. Created by residents at Asbury Methodist Village (AMV), 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.

"It is very rewarding to be mentoring the 3rd through 5th graders at Gaithersburg Elementary School and providing a male role model for the boys in the program." – Doug Cook, Mentor Program Volunteer

Above: Mentor program volunteer, Doug Cook, with student participant at the May 2024 end-of-the-year character trait awards

Fall 2024 Program Kick-Off Monthly Meeting Highlights

On September 6th, residents and community members gathered in the Hefner Auditorium for GBCI's first monthly meeting of the school year. As we begin programs again, we are excited to share how GBCI has grown over the past year and introduce our programs to new residents. Our new Administrative & Communications Manager, Natasha Kalitsi, shared her experience working in non-profits and ways she will be involved in assisting with GBCI's newsletters, emails, expanding communications channels, and general admin work. Later, our volunteers shared stories about their experience participating in GBCI's programs. It was moving to hear all the ways their participation has improved their lives and strengthened their connection to their community. Asbury resident and mentor program volunteer, Kathy Cook, encouraged audience members to



Above: GBCI staff with Mujer Fuerza y Coraje Early Steps Facilitators

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pursue their interest in mentoring, saying, “What skills do you need to have as a mentor? Perhaps the biggest one is a caring/loving heart for kids. Are you willing to actively listen? Can you encourage students when you see talents and personality traits that will carry them far in life? Can you use questions to encourage them to see other options if things are not working out? If you are answering yes, then you should be a mentor.... Last year I found real joy in watching the students have fun, grow, and mature, and I felt like both the students and mentors truly become a part of a very important community.”

Before wrapping up the meeting, audience members did a fun collaborative activity where they shared family traditions with the person sitting next to them. This was a great opportunity for new residents to learn about members of their community and a great example of how our program volunteers use conversation to build relationships with our participants. If you missed this month’s meeting, don’t worry! Join us as we connect with community members and discuss important topics at our **October Monthly Meeting on October 18th, 9:30 – 10:30 AM** in the Hefner Auditorium.



Above: Volunteers, Pat Johnson and Kathy Cook sharing about the Early Steps and Mentoring programs



Above: Mujer Fuerza y Coraje Early Steps facilitator Dhinora Escobar introducing herself and the MFC Early Steps team who teach in GBCI’s early literacy program on Wednesdays

Native Meadow Expansion at Asbury with Common Ground Earth



Did you know that a small reduction in lawn mowing frequency can bring several environmental benefits such as reducing greenhouse gases, sustaining ecosystems, and increasing overall biodiversity? Common Ground Earth is a nonprofit organization (NPO) working with other NPOs such as schools, churches, and retirement communities as well as businesses, and individuals in Montgomery County to promote sustainable practices and the adaptation of nature-based solutions in everyday life. One of their most popular sustainable solutions is the implementation of native meadows in lieu of maintained lawns. Native meadows provide habitats consisting of native plants like grasses, wildflowers, herbs, and other non-woody plants native to the Mid-Atlantic/Gaithersburg area. This brings several advantages such as improved storm management, habitats for wildlife, and increased resilience to pests. Native meadows are also cost-effective, require little to no fertilizer and pesticide use, and produce less pollution (air emissions and noise from combustible engines reduced) compared to manicured lawns.

We are excited to be part of the Asbury Foundation’s partnership with Common Ground Earth in a community outreach project to convert lawns to native meadows on Asbury Methodist Village’s campus. Through a grant provided by the Chesapeake Bay Trust, over the next year, the Asbury Team is converting 1.6 acres of lawn to native meadows. These changes can be seen on the corner parcel at Odendhal Avenue and Russel Avenue, and the hillside in the Nature Preserve. Through efforts like these, Asbury can maintain their status as a certified arboretum with 134 acres for wildlife and foliage while also doing their part in optimizing operations to lower cost and their impact on the environment. We are grateful for the Chesapeake Bay Trust’s support in helping us maintain an eco-friendly campus.

Make sure to join us at **GBCI’s annual Community Day event on September 21st from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM** to learn more from Common Ground Earth about the native meadows community project at Asbury Methodist Village.



Above: Example of a native meadow.



Above: Map of native meadow fields planted at Asbury by Common Ground Earth.

Announcements



Above: Volunteers at GBCI’s Community Day in 2023

This Saturday – Come Out to the 3rd Annual GBCI Community Day!

This Saturday, come and enjoy games, food, and music at GBCI’s Community Day! Asbury residents and members of the Gaithersburg community will have a chance to enjoy activities like a drum circle, bingo, face painting, and an informative session from Common Ground Earth about native meadows and their impact on the environment. Don’t miss out on the fun!

For more information:

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GBCI COMMUNITY DAY—Join us on 9/21 from 10:00am – 2:00pm.

RSVP or sign up to volunteer by calling 301-987-6635 or filling out our online form: <https://forms.gle/kveKq3AZC2QgvJUd7>. Your RSVP helps us estimate an accurate amount of food for lunch.

Thank you, in advance!

Rain Date: Saturday, October 12th, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM. We will keep you updated if any changes occur.

Intergenerational Art Program w/ Art Connect Gaithersburg

Join students and seniors from Gaithersburg in a community art program focused on the theme **“Aging is.....”**. Participants will work to create visual, performing, or literary art pieces that promote positive aging beliefs and combat negative aging stereotypes. This program will culminate in a community showcase open to the public at AMV in May 2025. Participation is Free, Registration is Online



When: Mondays from 4 - 6 pm

Where: Robertson Park Youth Center

For registration link or with questions: Call or Email Patty Malatt at (301)-987-6408 or pmallat@asbury.org

A partnership between the City of Gaithersburg’s Youth Services, Benjamin Gaither Center, and Gallery Program with Asbury Methodist Village, Art Against Ageism, and Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative.



Above: GBCI volunteers Ron and Yvonne Crouch skipping up the stairs at the 2023 mentoring field trip.

Make a Difference: Volunteer with GBCI!

Are you passionate about giving back to the community? Would meaningful connections with students and local families add value to your days? Join our group of enthusiastic volunteers making an impact in local schools and neighborhoods across Gaithersburg. GBCI offers a variety of volunteer opportunities including mentoring, early literacy, English conversation programs, neighborhood action organizing, newsletter writing, administrative support, and more. Come make a difference! **Contact Executive Director, Rebecca Cole at rebecca@gaitersburgcommunity.org or 301-216-4090 for more information.**