

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: David Winfield and students leading a session on Robots at Gaithersburg Elementary School

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."
— Coretta Scott King



Above Photo: Gail Schmitt, a volunteer in the Beginner English Conversation class, practices English with an English Conversation participant.

More Than a Language Class: GBCI's English Conversation Program

Written by: Constance Teage

Every Wednesday morning from September to May, a meaningful gathering takes place at Asbury Methodist Village. Volunteers and students come together for GBCI's English Conversation Program, a free, one-on-one language program that pairs adult English learners with Asbury residents who volunteer their time, patience, and life experience. Before the first student arrives, volunteers are there early, setting up chairs in place. Students trickle in one by one, reach for their name tags, and settle in

with smiles and the easy warmth of people who have come to know one another well. By 9:30, the room is alive with conversation, and for the next hour and fifteen minutes, language becomes a bridge, For more information:

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not just between English and a student's native tongue, but between generations, cultures, and lived experience.

Leading this program is GBCI's English Program Coordinator, Anieta Cruz-O'Neill, a Brazilian-born educator whose passion for language began long before she ever stepped into a classroom. She grew up with a deep love for books and learning, always eager to discover what would happen next in whatever she was reading. By the age of ten, she was carrying dictionaries in her school bag, memorizing every English word she could. After earning her degree in teaching English and Portuguese, she continued her education. "Being an ESL teacher brings me joy," she says, "because I get to work with something I love and help others learn it as well."

What makes this program special, Anieta explains, is its intergenerational heart. Volunteers who come from Asbury and the Gaithersburg community are mostly older adults with decades of life experience, paired one-on-one with students who are navigating the realities of life in a new country. "You are not just learning a new language from a tutor," she says. "You are exchanging life experiences and learning from someone who has gone through things you may not have experienced yet."

For students who arrive feeling afraid or shy, that intimacy matters deeply. Anieta understands their journey firsthand. She first came to the United States at twenty-four, alone, and though she already had experience with English, she still had so much to learn. "That experience makes me much more empathetic to my students' journey," she says, "because I have been there too."

The program continues to grow and adapt. This year, for the first time, the program will host Summer gatherings at the Asbury Sports Complex. Born out of feedback from student surveys, the gatherings give students and volunteers space to connect outside the classroom through games and conversation. And beginning this fall, GBCI's English Conversation Program will expand to include a virtual class on Zoom, held on Monday mornings from 9:30 to 10:45 AM. This addition will make the program more accessible to students who feel safer or more comfortable joining from home.

"Knowledge is power," Anieta says. "When you know English, you feel more empowered to express your needs, share your dreams, stand up for your rights, and have a voice no matter where you are in the world."

At GBCI, that voice is always welcome. Because at its heart, this program has never been just about English. It has always been about people building relationships and creating community.



Above Photo: Anieta Cruz O'Neill, Georgia Portocarrero, the intermediate program lead, and an English Conversation student during the closing program for Fall 2025.

GBCI's FACES OF SERVICE

THANK YOU!



Above Photo: David Winfield assists a student in the Gaithersburg Elementary School mentoring Program

David Winfield has spent most of his life solving problems. A Harvard-educated engineer who spent nearly four decades at IBM, Loral, and Lockheed Martin, his most significant work centered on the mathematical specification for computing GPS orbits. After retiring in 2001, he continued learning and serving, volunteering in English conversation programs, supporting engineering education at Watkins Mill High School, and taking courses at Montgomery College. In 2017, he moved to Asbury Methodist Village, where he found in GBCI a natural extension of a life already oriented toward community.

David first connected with GBCI in the spring of 2023, assisting in an English class at Gaithersburg Middle School.

One of his most memorable moments came while watching students read *The Hunger Games* and genuinely wrestle with the meaning of hypocrisy. He later volunteered with an after-school program at Gaithersburg Elementary School, where third- through fifth-grade students built Artbots—small battery-powered robots that drew colorful patterns on paper. As students stripped wires, connected motors to batteries, and adjusted propellers to change the balance and movement of their bots, they discovered engineering concepts like torque through hands-on learning. Every student left with a one-of-a-kind work of art and the tiny robot that had created it.

As David became more involved with GBCI, he also joined the Neighborhood Action team, drawn by his longstanding interest in immigration and affordable housing. The team, which grew out of earlier organizing efforts with AIM and the Cider Mill community, has advocated for affordable housing, supported the Safe Places initiative, organized for the renovation of South Lake Elementary School, and, more recently, focused on immigration advocacy. David's contributions have been practical and meaningful: testifying before both the Gaithersburg City Council and the Montgomery County Council on important legislative measures and establishing a secure communication network connecting residents across Asbury Methodist Village, Cider Mill, and neighboring communities.

When asked what drives him, David's answer is characteristically direct: he wants to see a well-organized society. He acknowledges that this work requires patience and that its impact is not always immediately visible, but he believes that consistently showing up makes a difference. For anyone who shares concerns about immigration and housing, his message is simple: meaningful change begins

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close to home, and Neighborhood Action offers an opportunity to work together to strengthen the community.

David, thank you for showing up, for speaking up, and for bringing both your expertise and your heart to this work. Your dedication, curiosity, and quiet consistency remind us that community is built one act of service at a time. We are grateful to have you with us.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

INTERGENERATIONAL FUN DAY!

Join us for an intergenerational day with 6th-12th grade youth from New Neighbor Interfaith Alliance (NNIA). Participate in various activities: card-making, poetry, and more!

AUGUST 5th

Intergenerational Workshops

Various locations on campus
(please refer to Icon calendar)
12:00pm to 4:30pm

Pizza & Games

Rosborough Community Rooms
4:30pm to 5:30pm

Rule Breakers Movie

Rosborough Theatre
5:30pm to 7:30pm

JOIN US

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Rebecca Cole:
301-216-4090
rebecca@gaithersburgbelovedcommunity.org



SAVE THE DATE!

4TH ANNUAL GBCI COMMUNITY DAY

IN COLLABORATION WITH ASBURY 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Rosborough Overflow Parking Lot
Asbury Methodist Village
301 Odendhal Ave

JOIN US FOR A DAY OF:

- Face Painting
- Games
- Food
- Music
- Family Activities

For more Info contact GBCI: 301-216-4090



UPCOMING EVENTS!

-  Wednesday, August 5th, 2026, 12:00 – 7:30 PM - **Intergenerational Fun Day**, The Rosborough Cultural Arts and Wellness Center
-  Tuesday, August 25th, 2026, 10:00 – 11:00 AM – **Mentoring Volunteer Orientation**, Wallace Community Room
-  Friday, September 11th, 10:00 – 11:00 AM, **September Monthly Meeting: Program Kick Off**, Hefner Auditorium, Asbury Methodist Village