

# SOMETIMES CREATIVE SOLUTIONS ARE THE **BEST SOLUTIONS**

When the activity director at Bethany Home in Dubuque reached out with an unusual request, it sparked an opportunity for connection. Several residents at the nursing home wanted to tutor students learning English—but there were a few logistical challenges to address. Weekly transportation for the residents wasn't feasible, and the college couldn't manage the logistics of transporting students to Dubuque regularly. That's when Dr. Seo Hyun Park, director of the Intensive English Language Institute, came up with a creative solution: Could the residents commit to visiting the college just once a month during the spring semester? The answer was a resounding yes.

This simple yet innovative idea quickly became a win for everyone involved. Each month, four residents from Bethany Home are driven to the college to spend an hour in conversation with ESL students, helping them practice their English. The program launched in January, when the residents met with a Level 1 class of students who had arrived in the United States just three weeks earlier.

At first, the room buzzed with nervous energy. The students, eager but shy, had prepared questions for their guests. Then, it was the residents' turn to ask questions. "How long will you study here?" Blank expression.

"How many years will you be in Epworth?" Blank expression. Finally, a breakthrough: "How long will you be at the college?" A spark of understanding lit up the conversation. "Two years for English, then four years for undergraduate," one student explained, proud to get the words just right.

As the hour unfolded, the tentative exchanges gave way to animated discussions. They talked about families, hobbies, and favorite foods. Laughter echoed through the room as both students and residents found common ground—and occasionally stumbled over unfamiliar words. By the end, the initial nerves had melted away, replaced by wide smiles and a sense of accomplishment. Before leaving, the students eagerly posed for selfies with their new friends, thanking them for their visit.

In the coming months, this group of former teachers, nurses, and lifelong learners from Bethany Home — including a remarkable 101-year-old — will return to engage with various ESL classes, fostering connections and bridging generations. What began as a logistical challenge has become an enriching experience for everyone involved—proving that sometimes, creative solutions truly are the best solutions.

