

INSTITUTE FOR ENGAGED AGING Newsletter

Gratitude and Giving Edition | Issue No. 6 | Fall 2025



IEA news

Welcoming new faces and the expansion of the IEA at the University Center of Greenville (UCG).

Season of thanks and giving

Celebrate the season by practicing gratitude, mindfulness moments and finding inspiration to give back.

Research spotlight

Discover how our latest study will support the health and well-being of grandparents raising grandchildren in S.C.



Learn more about the IEA

Who we are

The Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA) uncovers, creates and shares innovative approaches to help people thrive as they age through research, education and community partnerships.

At the IEA, we believe aging should be active, connected and fulfilling. We are dedicated to empowering older adults to stay involved with their families and communities by promoting practices that truly enhance quality of life. Through close collaboration with Clemson faculty, local organizations and partner universities, we tackle the wide range of needs faced by older adults. Our goal is to help individuals, regardless of their background, income or health, enjoy an engaged life.

With the aging population expected to nearly double by 2030, the IEA is proud to serve as a trusted source of knowledge, support and inspiration for older adults and the communities they call home.



Research - PACT study



Community outreach - health bingo



Education - "Avoiding Grandparent Scams" talk



Gratitude is probably something you practice regularly - in your families and communities. Both are likely so engrained in your life that you do not even realize you are doing it!

In this season of thanks, the IEA newsletter focuses on gratitude and giving. We share some recent research about older adults and volunteering, tips for infusing gratitude into your mindfulness activities and ways that you may consider giving in the coming months. We appreciate your readership and welcome suggested topics of interest to you for IEA newsletters in 2026.

With that, we thank you so much for your continued support. We cannot do this important work without you.

— **Lesley Ross, Ph.D.**

Professor, Psychology Department
SmartState/SmartLife Endowed Chair
in Aging and Cognition
Director, Institute for Engaged Aging
Clemson University
Director, South Carolina Alzheimer's
Disease Research Center

We would love to hear from you!

Help us shape future programming for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia support.

The Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA) is exploring new programs for older adults, as well as ways to better support individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementia.

Please take a moment to complete the survey and indicate whether you would be interested in participating in any of the programs listed. Your feedback will help us better serve you and our community.

Scan the QR code below or visit the *"We want to hear from you!"* section on our website to complete the survey.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT TO US!



SCAN ME

How to scan a QR code?

1. Open your camera app on your cellphone.
2. Point it at the QR code.
3. Tap the link that appears to get started.

IEA team highlights

Welcoming new faces to the team

We are excited to introduce the newest members of our team! Each one brings unique skills, experiences and energy that strengthen our collective efforts and help us grow together. Get to know them below and join us in giving them a warm and enthusiastic welcome!



Olivia Wilson is a research associate at the IEA. She received her Bachelor of Science in psychology with a minor in biological sciences from Clemson University. Her research interests include Alzheimer's disease, dementia, memory, learning and attention.



Madelyn Brancato is a research associate at the IEA. She graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in psychology and a minor in gender, sexuality and women's studies from Clemson University. In the future, Madelyn hopes to continue her research interests in a clinical psychology Ph.D. program.



Daniel Bunch is a research associate at the IEA. He graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in psychology in 2025. His research interests include addiction science and recovery, mental health, memory and dementia/Alzheimer's. Daniel's goal is to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.



Gabby Gatto is a research associate at the IEA. She graduated summa cum Laude from Union College in June 2025 in psychology and a minor in sociology. Her research interests include memory, creativity, aging and mindfulness. Gabby plans to pursue a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience or psychology.



Luke Dula is a research associate for the Active Mind study at the Tampa location of Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging. He graduated summa cum laude from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a B.S. in psychology and a minor in cognitive science.

Fall prevention classes

A key step to staying safe and active

The IEA offers FREE fall prevention classes featuring the evidence-based program, A Matter of Balance (AMOB). This program is designed to help older adults reduce their risk of falling through group discussions, exercise training, mutual problem-solving, role-play activities and homework assignments. E-mail us at IEA@clermson.edu for more information or to register.



Limited spots available,
register today!

When?

Now enrolling for upcoming 2026 classes!

January

6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27 & 29

(Every Tuesday and Thursday)

At what time?

From 1:30 to 3:30 PM

Where?

Clemson Balance Lab - IEA (5th floor)
Oconee Memorial Hospital,
Seneca, S.C.

Number of classes

8 classes total

You are not alone!

Dementia caregiver support group



The IEA facilitates a supportive space for caregivers, family members and friends (age 18+) of individuals living with any type of dementia to ask questions, share experiences and receive guidance on caregiving. The support group meets the third Friday of every month from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. To register, please contact IEA@clermson.edu or call (864) 916-6220. We hope to see you there!

Respite program for attending dementia caregivers. While you attend the support group, your loved one with dementia can participate in a separate, supervised brain-stimulation activity program. Participants must be able to engage with others with minimal supervision.

Need help with care during the support group? To apply for a **free sitter service** for your loved one through the Alzheimer's Association, please contact 1-800-272-3900.

Upcoming support groups

Friday, October 17, 2025

Friday, November 21, 2025

At what time?

From 1:30 to 3:30 PM

Practicing gratitude

Cultivating gratitude for healthy aging

Autumn's golden hues offer a perfect background to pause and reflect. Gratitude is not just a seasonal tradition. It is also a science-backed habit that supports healthy aging.

According to a systematic review on gratitude practices published in the journal *Einstein*, regularly engaging in gratitude can reduce stress, improve sleep and foster stronger social connections, all especially important as we age. It is a simple practice with powerful potential to boost well-being, at any stage of life.

At the IEA, we invite you to embrace the season with simple, intentional gratitude practices:

Gratitude journaling

Write down 1-3 things you are thankful for, focusing on seasonal joys like cozy sweaters, fall colors, warm drinks or simply the everyday luxuries you are grateful for. Weekly reflections can lead to lasting emotional benefits.

Take a gratitude walk

Get outside and soak in the beauty of the season. Notice the details like



Source: <https://journal.einstein.br/article/the-effects-of-gratitude-interventions-a-systematic-review-and-meta-analysis/>

the crunch of the leaves, the color of the sky or the feel of the cool air and reflect on what you are grateful for in that moment.

Send a thank-you note

A handwritten message to a friend, family member or colleague can brighten their day and yours! Gratitude shared is gratitude multiplied.

Reflect with others

Around a fall meal or during a community event, take a moment to ask: "What is one thing you are grateful for this season?" It is a powerful way to build connections.

Practicing gratitude this fall can be a small step toward a more grounded, joyful season.

Upcoming events

Building connections for healthy aging

The dedicated teams at the IEA and SC-ADRC are committed to boosting social connections, sharing valuable health information and building stronger ties between older adults and the services available to them.

This fall, we are celebrating the many opportunities we have had to connect and learn about healthy aging. We invite you to stay connected for more ways to get involved and keep learning in the months ahead!



Mindfulness moment

Thankfulness through the senses

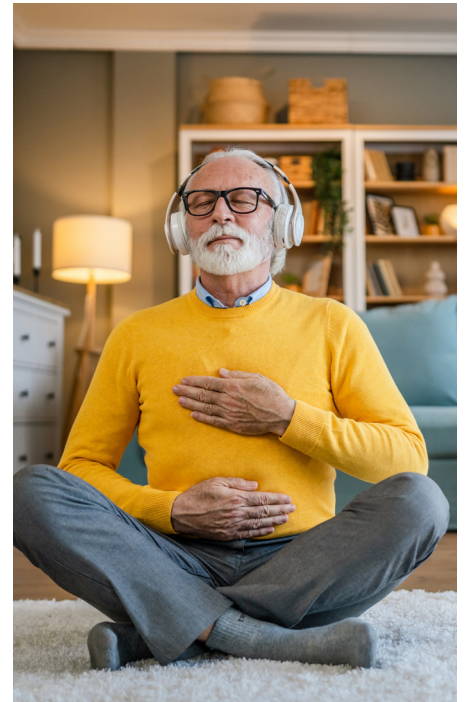
Take a quiet moment to pause and reflect on the ways your body connects you to the world. Focus on the senses that are most accessible to you today—whether it is touch, sound, sight or smell.

This grounding practice helps anchor you in the moment and reveals sources of joy that often go unnoticed. Even the subtlest sensations can remind us of the good that surrounds us. When you are finished, try out this journal prompt: Which senses do you rely on to experience

the world around you? Reflect on one meaningful sensory experience.

Here are a few sensory prompts to guide your reflection:

- Sight: What is something visually beautiful or comforting around you?
- Sound: What sound brings you calm or joy right now?
- Smell: Is there a scent that reminds you of a positive memory?
- Touch: What texture or sensation feels grounding or soothing?
- Taste: Think of a flavor or food you have enjoyed recently.



Season of thanks, spirit of service

How older adults enrich our communities



Fall is a perfect time to honor the spirit of gratitude and those who embody it every day.

Older adult volunteers are among the community's most generous givers, offering time, wisdom and heart in ways that help us all.

Older adults bring a wealth of life experience and compassion to their volunteer roles. Whether mentoring, supporting food programs or helping neighbors, their service builds intergenerational connections, strengthens local support networks and inspires a culture of giving. Their presence enriches the community, as research suggests.

Studies have shown older adults who regularly volunteer enhance the lives of others while experiencing greater emotional well-being, more physical activity and stronger sense of purpose.

Volunteering may be personally fulfilling. Older adults often report feeling more connected to others, less lonely or isolated and grateful for the opportunity to contribute. Even a few hours a month can offer meaningful engagement, with benefits that echo throughout the season and beyond.

Join the movement of gratitude! This fall, let us celebrate what we are thankful for and how we can give back. If you are an older adult and you are looking to make a difference, volunteering might be the most rewarding gift you give this season.

Your support matters

Strengthening communities & advancing research

We are deeply grateful for our readers, volunteers and generous supporters who help us enrich the lives of older adults in meaningful ways. Your time, donations and encouragement fuel everything we do at the IEA.

While our research is primarily funded through grants, it is your generosity that sustains the majority of our educational and outreach programs. These vital efforts would not be possible without you.

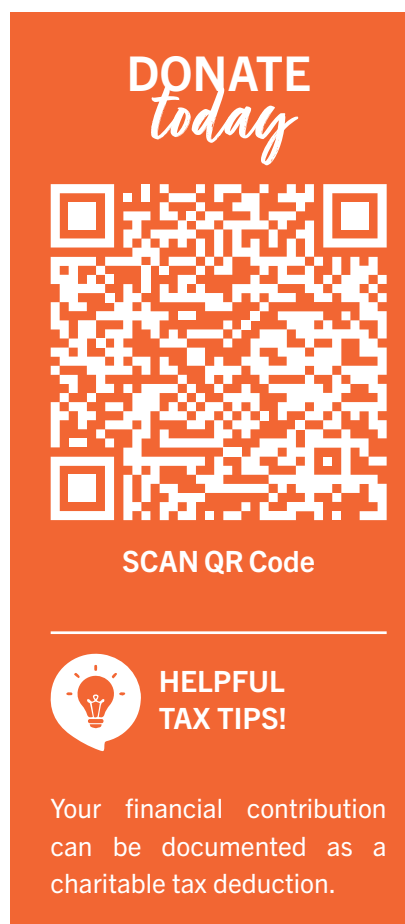
Want to do more? There are many ways to give, whether by sharing our mission, volunteering your time or donating.

Your generosity makes a difference and the funds directly support the IEA and the communities we serve. Together, we are making a lasting impact!

Mail checks to:

Clemson University Foundation
P.O. Box 1889
Clemson, S.C.
29633-1889

Be sure to include "Institute for Engaged Aging" in the memo line for your gift!



Online donations can be made at: clermson.edu/centers-institutes/aging

*Please check that the designation field on the website lists: "Institute for Engaged Aging."

Fall back time change

Enjoy an extra hour of rest

Do not forget to set your clocks back one hour this fall! On Sunday, November 2nd, Daylight Saving Time ends, giving you an extra hour of sleep. Enjoy the extra hour!



Doll therapy

Support OMH patients

Bring comfort and joy to Prisma Health Oconee Memorial Hospital (OMH) patients with Alzheimer's disease and/or related dementia (AD/ADRD).

The IEA is accepting donations for the OMH doll therapy drive. Doll therapy may significantly reduce behavioral and psychological symptoms in patients living with AD/ADRD.

How you can help:

- Donate new baby dolls or life-like toy dogs and cats.
- Drop-off location:
Front desk of the IEA on the 5th floor of OMH.

Your donations will make a meaningful impact on the lives of those living with Alzheimer's. Thank you for your kindness and generosity!



IEA staff member delivering doll donations to support the OMH Doll Therapy Program

Grandparent caregiver study

Real-life experiences of raising grandchildren



A grandparent caregiver is someone who takes on the role of a primary parent by raising one or more of their grandchildren on a full-time basis.

In South Carolina, over 50,000 grandparents are raising their grandchildren full-time. Whether due to unplanned circumstances or arrangements, grandparents often step into caregiving roles with little preparation and frequently without adequate support.

While some grandparent caregivers are as young as 30 years old, many are 50 years and older. The added stress of unexpectedly raising a grandchild can impact both physical and mental health.

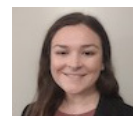
To better understand and support these caregivers, Abby Stephan, Ph.D., and Hye Won Chai, Ph.D., have a new research study focused on the everyday experiences and health of grandparent caregivers. The study explores how daily activities relate to physical and psychological health indicators like heart rate variability (HRV) and mood, while testing how smartwatches and smartphones can be used to monitor health and well-being in real time.

Participants are given a Fitbit watch and smartphone for two weeks. Each evening, they complete a quick 5-minute survey. These tools track day-to-day experiences like daily mood, stress and physical responses like sleep patterns and heart rate variability. By collecting real-world data, the team hopes to get a clearer picture of what life is really like for grandparent caregivers and how best to support them.

Why it matters

The health of grandparent caregivers has a direct influence on the development, health and well-being of the grandchildren they are raising. Caregiving can take a unique toll on physical, mental and social health that requires targeted support and policy attention. With this study, researchers hope to create preventative support tools, help communities better serve grandfamilies and improve the precision and timing of interventions related to health care for grandparents.

About the principal investigators:



Abby Stephan, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor
Clemson University

Abby Stephan, Ph.D., studies intergenerational relationships, healthy aging and lifespan development using interdisciplinary, mixed methods to inform applied evidence-based educational programs and support lifelong learning.



Hye Won Chai, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor
Clemson University

Hye Won Chai, Ph.D., studies how family and social relationships affect psychological, physical and cognitive health in later life, with a focus on daily interactions and health differences by rurality and sociodemographic backgrounds.

“Research shows there is immense value in trying new things, with benefits that include strengthened connections, enhanced sense of purpose and even boosts in health,” says the research team.

Want to learn more about the South Carolina Grandparent Caregiver Health Study or how to get involved? Please complete our interest form or send us an e-mail at GrandfamilyStudySC@gmail.com

QR Code to interest form:



Help yourself while helping others

We are looking for dedicated volunteers just like you!

There are many ways you can get involved with the Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA). Your involvement in research is essential for advancing treatments and prevention for Alzheimer's disease, promoting healthy aging and improving the lives of older adults in South Carolina, including our friends, family and community. Please contact each study or program to learn more or sign up.



Active Mind Study

Location: IEA - Seneca, S.C.

Site coordinator: Megan Schumpert

Email: IEA@clemson.edu

Phone: (864) 916-6220

Objective: This study will determine if computerized brain training exercises can improve everyday abilities and reduce the risk of dementia in persons at a higher risk.



Focus Group

Location: Upstate, S.C.

Coordinator: Abby Stephan, Ph.D.

Email: atsteph@clemson.edu

Phone: (864) 916-6220

The Intergenerational Family Processes around Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders in Rural Communities objective is to explore how rural families discuss and respond on issues related to aging, such as Alzheimer's and dementia.



Human Movement Study

Location: IEA - Seneca, S.C.

Coordinator: Reed Gurchiek

Email: hhentni@clemson.edu

Phone: (609) 320-3875

Objective: The Free-Living Human Movement Study measures human motion in everyday life to understand how physical and cognitive functioning are related in older adults.



CHAP

Location: Jacksonville, Florida residents only

Coordinator: Marsha Hampton

Email: mhampt3@clemson.edu

Phone: (864) 916-6207

Objective: The study identifies the mechanisms through which interpersonal conscientiousness promotes healthier cognitive aging and its role within close relationships in a sample of participants.



BA-UMAP

Location: Nationwide (Online)

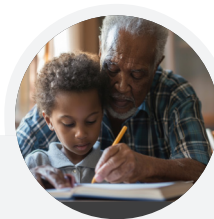
Coordinator: Marsha Hampton

Email: mhampt3@clemson.edu

Phone: (864) 916-6207

Website: secure.ba-umap.com

Objective: The Black American United Memory and Aging Project (BA-UMAP) examines how factors across multiple domains impact progressive cognitive decline in a longitudinal sample of middle-aged and older Black adults.



Grandparent Caregivers

Location: IEA - Seneca, S.C.

Coordinators: Abby Stephan, Ph.D. and Hye Won Chai, Ph.D.

E: GrandfamilyStudySC@gmail.com

Phone: (864) 916-6220

Objective: The study evaluates use of smart tools to track grandparent caregivers' daily activities and health over 14 days, examines links between their experiences and health and explores their interest in health education.

Keep your mind active: crossword puzzle

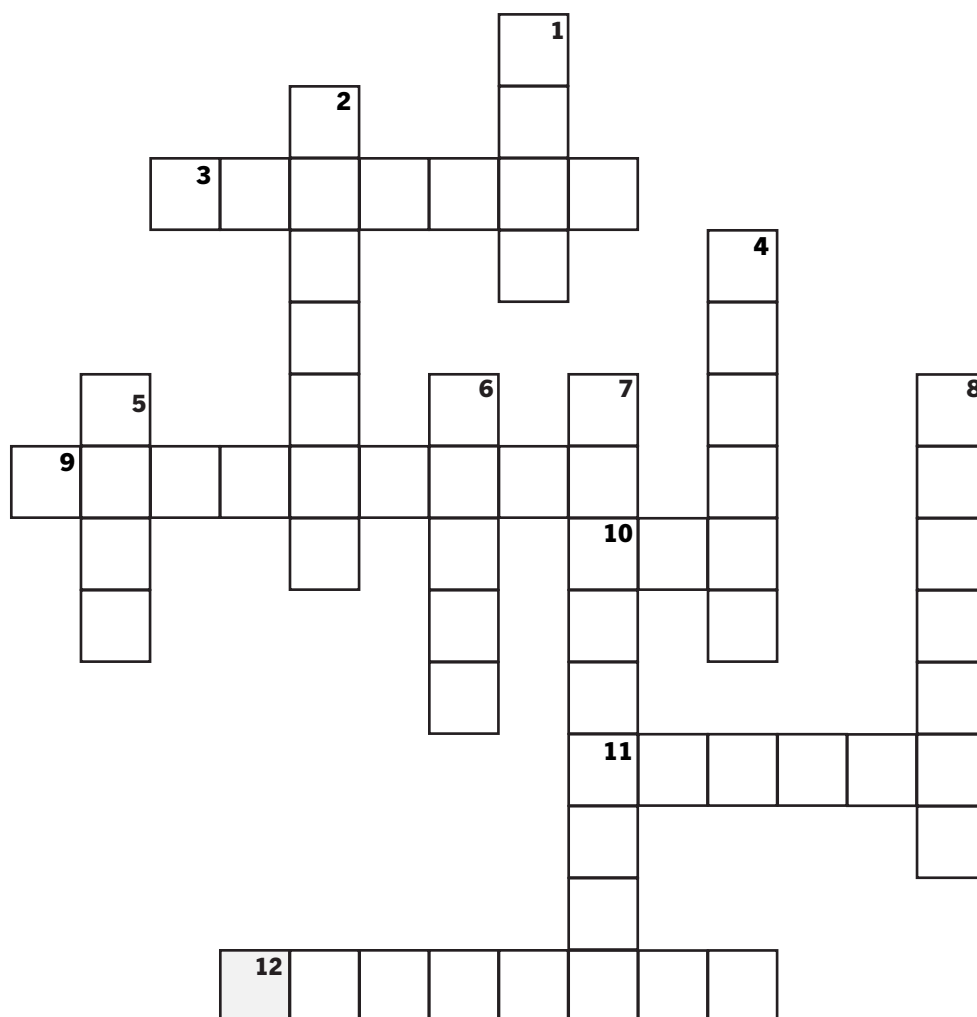
DOWN

1. Caring and generous
2. Assisting others
4. The opposite of rude
5. A strong connection between people
6. Simply saying this can brighten someone's day
7. A feeling of being thankful
8. To deeply value something

ACROSS

3. Something you give on a birthday
9. To give your time or effort freely
10. A random ____ of kindness
11. A word you say to show appreciation
12. Could describe someone who puts others first

** Answers on page 11



Would you rather...?

"Would you rather" gratitude, giving and holiday edition to spark thoughtful reflection around kindness, generosity and thankfulness.

1. Would you rather donate your time volunteering for a cause you care about or donate money to support it?
2. Would you rather show gratitude through words or through actions?
3. Would you rather go to a big gathering or have a small, intimate dinner?



Hye Won Chai

Research Assistant Professor

1. Donate my time volunteering for a cause that I care about.
2. Show gratitude through actions.
3. Have a small, intimate dinner.



Connor Stephens

IEA Project Manager

1. Donate my time volunteering for a cause that I care about.
2. Show gratitude through my actions.
3. Go to a big gathering.



Anne Aycock

Research Specialist

1. Donate my time volunteering for a cause I care about.
2. Show gratitude through words.
3. Have a small, intimate dinner.



A recipe worth sharing

Garlicky herbed bruschetta



Serves: 4



Prep time: 5 minutes

In this issue, we are sharing a delicious and healthy recipe from The Official MIND Diet website. This fresh bruschetta is the perfect light, yet flavorful appetizer when served with toasted whole grain bread for social gatherings. It also doubles as a quick and satisfying lunch or snack.

Link source: [officialminddiet.com https://theofficialminddiet.com/recipe-bank/garlicky-herbed-bruschetta](https://theofficialminddiet.com/recipe-bank/garlicky-herbed-bruschetta)

INGREDIENTS

- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 cups of chopped tomatoes
- ¼ cup of fresh oregano leaves
- 1 tbsp of lemon juice
- ¼ tsp of salt
- ½ tsp of black pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium pan over low heat, add the olive oil, garlic slices and oregano. Sauté for 30-60 seconds or until the garlic is fragrant. Be careful as the garlic can easily burn. Remove from heat.
2. In a medium bowl gently toss the chopped tomatoes, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Carefully pour the warm olive oil, garlic and herbs over the tomatoes.
3. Mix until incorporated.
4. Serve with toasted whole-grain bread.

Join the PALS Network

Research opportunities for everyone



Partners and Advocates for Lifespan Science (PALS) Network connects individuals of all ages interested in participating in research at Clemson University!

To sign up, please call (864) 916-6220, e-mail IEA@clemson.edu or complete the survey on our website.

Please consider joining!

Game answers



DOWN

1. KIND
2. HELPING
4. POLITE
5. BOND
6. HELLO
7. GRATITUDE
8. CHERISH

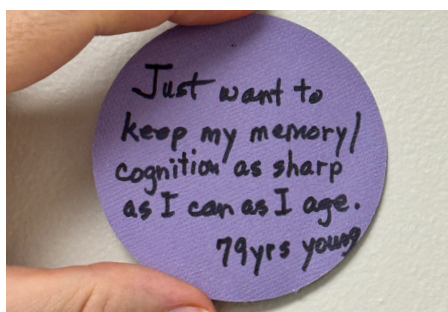
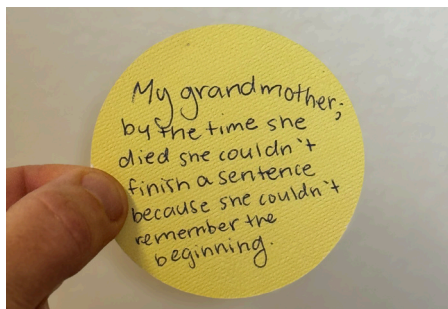


ACROSS

3. PRESENT
9. VOLUNTEER
10. ACT
11. THANKS
12. SELFLESS

Why I participate? We all have a reason!

We are thrilled that more people are joining our studies!



Your enthusiasm and participation are truly making a difference, and we are excited to see how the IEA continues to grow and impact the community.

IEA News Greenville expansion

We are thrilled to announce the expansion of the IEA at the University Center of Greenville (UCG) with an expanded space and a phlebotomy lab! The addition features a larger community area designed for gatherings, events and collaboration, with dedicated rooms for conducting research and training.

We look forward to welcoming you into this new chapter of our growing community. Come visit and see what is new!



IEA community room at UCG

Contact us!

Have questions, feedback or just want to say hello?

Our team is here and ready to assist you. Your input helps us grow and serve you better. Please reach out using the contact info below. We would love to hear from you!



IEA@clemson.edu



(864) 916-6220



PRISMA Health Oconee Memorial Hospital
298 Memorial Drive, Seneca, S.C., 29672



Follow us!

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Engage with us through Facebook. Stay informed about our upcoming events, news and valuable information!