

Education Center Expands Staff: New Apartments To Open Soon

Kids Bid Adieu to Steve Axberg, Popular Former Education Director Who Is Heading Back to School Himself

(Mount Laurel, NJ) – This October, FSHD began accepting applications for the 60 new apartments that will soon become available for rent at our award-winning development, Ethel R. Lawrence Homes (ERLH) and a nearby site in Mount Laurel now known as Robinson Estates.

This exciting development has required FSHD to expand the staff at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center to accommodate additional children we expect will join the ERLH community.



In August 2017, we welcomed our new Education director, Michael Morris (*center left*), and an Associate Education Director, Chantel Young (*center right*), who is serving our teen population. We also enjoy full-time support from two college graduate Jesuit Volunteers who provide us with a year of service. This year, our JVs hail from New Orleans (Kathleen Harmon, a IT graduate of Spring Hill College, *far right*) and Baltimore, Maryland (Andy Beck, a political science

major from Haverford College, *far left*).

FSHD's former Education Director, Steve Axberg, announced in June that he planned on returning to college to get his teaching certificate. Steve, who hopes to work in Philadelphia, had many young fans at the Education Center.

"Mr. Steve was a nice guy who always helped us," said Jhalil Conway, 11, a 6th grader. "I'm going to miss him because he was always honest and treated me like an adult."

Talise Banks, 10, a 5th grader, also had kind words for Steve. "Mr. Steve was fun! I will miss him because he always helped me and was super chill. He respected me and supported me trying to find what I liked in school."

Michael Morris, FSHD's new Education Director, said he was grateful to Steve for professionalizing and expanding the program. Under Steve's direction, the staff grew to two JVs and FSHD also developed a database that tracks the progress of all of our children. "Steve dedicated two years to developing the homework club and it



wouldn't be what it was today without his contributions,” said Mike, a former Jesuit Volunteer himself, who holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management and a minor in Counseling and Human Services from the University of Scranton.

Prior to joining FSHD, Mike spent two years working in education as a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC). He taught computers, health, and P.E. classes while also substitute teaching middle school and running the afterschool program at an elementary school in Phoenix. Mike moved from Arizona to Boston where he worked as a part of the academic success team at West End House Boys & Girls Club. Mike said he enjoys helping our kids excel in academics and thrive in real life.

“I am so grateful for my time so far at the Education Center,” Mike said. “I am excited to continue to expand and reinvigorate our services for the community. Attendance is up already and we hope to continue to grow in a way that suits the needs and interests of our children, Ethel Lawrence Homes, and the greater Mount Laurel Community”

Assisting Mike is Chantel Young, our new Associate Director of Education, who was brought on to develop and head a new college preparatory program called “Mission: Excellence.” The mission of this program is to promote higher education, degree attainment, improved parental involvement, and a culture of personal excellence among the students of Ethel Lawrence Homes.

Chantel, a former volunteer at the Education Center who has extensive managerial experience in the telecommunications industry, also provides supervisory support and tutoring assistance at the Homework Club. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Thomas Edison State University in Trenton, NJ.

“I am so happy to be working at the Education Center helping children and families,” said Chantel. “There is nothing better than living out your passion. I’m on a mission to equip our future leaders with what they need to be successful in life.”

Chantel, who was recruited by Steve Axberg, said she was grateful to the former Education Director. “Steve is an amazing individual and one of the main reasons why I’m here,” said Chantel. “His commitment to the well-being of the students at Ethel Lawrence was evident from our very first conversation. He has laid a great foundation that I am honored to build upon.”

Joining Chantel and Mike for the 2017-2018 school year are Jesuit Volunteers Kathleen Harmon, a spunky camp enthusiast with a passion for baking who hopes to bring many fun STEM ideas to the Center, and Andy



Beck, who is excited to introduce some basic social-justice lessons to the center through our enrichment and mindfulness programs.

FSDH has operated the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center, a homework club and summer enrichment program for grades K-8, on the grounds of Ethel R. Lawrence Homes since 2003. Throughout the year, our dedicated Education Center staff works closely with the Mount Laurel School District to provide a disciplined but creative program, which includes after-school homework assistance, parent participation workshops, a summer academic camp that features enrichment field trips and programs, and one-on-one year-round tutoring to transform children's lives through educational achievement and enrichment.