

MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

Fall
2016

Connecting
People
Who Care with a
Cause that Matters

at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes

NEWSLETTER

Meet Our Children

Ethel R. Lawrence Homes (ERLH), developed by Fair Share Housing Development, Inc., is one of the first affordable housing communities in New Jersey's suburbs to house very low-income families. The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at ERLH offers an after-school Homework Club, a Summer Enrichment Program, one-on-one tutoring and college prep assistance to ensure that the children residing at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes get the support they need to make the most of the opportunities available in the high-achieving Mount Laurel School District.



Raquel

Age: 10, 5th Grade

Excels at: Softball, music and math

Hopes to Be: A Basketball Player

"Homework Club helps me understand things I don't know. I like to go to summer camp, and I had a great time at the baseball game."

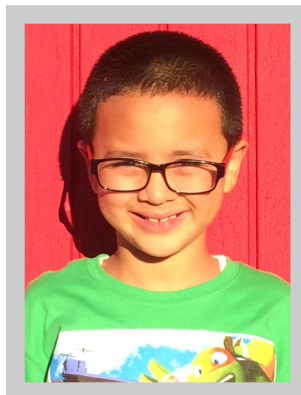
Dante

Age: 7, 2nd Grade

Excels at: Art and Minecraft

Hopes to Be: A Conductor

"The Homework Club is nice and really fun! We do cool STEM activities like making catapults!"



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FAIR SHARE
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
building homes and hope

FSHD: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY



The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes is operated by Fair Share Housing Development, a non-profit housing and social services provider that seeks to reduce racial and economic segregation in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties by developing affordable housing in high-opportunity communities. Ethel R. Lawrence Homes (ERLH), our award-winning flagship development in Mount Laurel Township, provides 140 townhome-

style apartments in a safe environment with access to one of NJ's top school districts.

Affordable housing in an integrated community is the first step to helping families overcome problems stemming from generational cycles of poverty, racial segregation, economic isolation, and the lack of a good education. The key to positive permanent change is to provide ERLH children with supplemental educational support and enrichment programs to enable them to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available in Mount Laurel Township.

The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at ERLH is staffed by a full-time Education Director (Steven Axberg) and this year for the first time, two college graduate Jesuit Volunteers who provide a year of service (Meghan Murphy and Margaret Cowles). We also get assistance from various teen mentors who volunteer with local organizations. 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 an after-school Homework Club, parent participation workshops, a Summer Enrichment camp, and one-on-one year-round tutoring to transform children's lives through educational achievement and enrichment. Homework Club alumni also get support with the college application process thanks to SAT prep classes, campus tours and other programs designed to help teens understand the application requirements and how to apply for financial aid.



Ethel R. Lawrence is often called the "**Rosa Parks of Affordable Housing.**" A teacher, wife, and mother of nine, Lawrence was renowned for braving racist threats to fight exclusionary zoning in NJ's suburbs. She died in 1994, six years before ERLH opened its doors.

PARENT SPOTLIGHT

"I feel really lucky to have the Education Center. My kids were getting homework help even in first grade. Most of the parents here work, so we don't have much time to help our kids with school. I especially like the summer program because I wouldn't be able to afford to send my kids to camp because they are all so expensive. Being at Ethel Lawrence Homes is like being in heaven. My family really is blessed to be where we are."

-Ana Moncada



Ana with daughter Kiana

IMPROVING FOCUS WITH MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

By Steve Axberg, Education Director

We are always looking to not only provide academic assistance to the children who attend our education center, but also to help them socially, mentally, and emotionally. The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center recently implemented a mindfulness/meditation program that benefits our students in all four realms.

The definition of mindfulness can be very subjective, however it is generally agreed that it means awareness of oneself and others. According to Greater Good in Action, a science-based website affiliated with UC Berkeley, mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment. It also involves acceptance: paying attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them. This allows our thoughts to tune into the present moment, as opposed to rehashing the past or imagining the future.



Our new Jesuit Volunteer Meghan Murphy experienced the benefits of mindfulness firsthand during college. It helped relieve anxiety during testing and generally reduced her stress. Also, numerous studies show the practice leads to improved attention, better academic performance and emotional regulation; it even helps people be more compassionate. These benefits transpire regardless of race, education, or socio-economic status.

We have seen these benefits in our students. When the kids first get out of school, we meet in the back room for five to 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation. At first, our children found the practice strange but they quickly warmed up to it. We have observed students who are typically fidgety and unfocused become much more willing to work on task.

We also continue to practice our Huddle, which is a community building activity where students all check in with each other. With increased self-awareness, our children can better identify how they are feeling. This allows for the group to work better together as a community, and allows our staff to have a better understanding of our children. We expect the benefits to only grow as the school year progresses.

Enrichment Camp Makes Learning Fun!

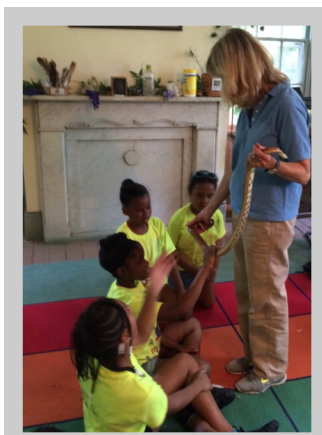


Our six weeks of academically enriching summer camp were a huge success! Our Kindergarten through 5th grade students explored a multitude of interesting topics that were engaging both in a scholarly and recreational way.

In our first week of camp, our children practiced math skills, cooking competence, and even learned some marketing principles through our Lemonade Stand. During our science-themed week, we learned about and made our own hovercrafts. Kids also got to enjoy a relay race where we competed while learning about the components of color.

However, we didn't just focus on math and science; we also got involved in many creative pursuits. Beginning in the first week and concluding at the end of camp, our children went through a creative writing process where they were able to create their very own books. Valuable life lessons such as "not judging a book by its cover" and the importance of teamwork provided the foundational groundwork for this fun project. Lastly, our children wrote and starred in their own play during the last week of camp. Everyone was involved in the writing and set design!

Besides these activities, we also enjoyed a number of educational field trips. During our science week, we went to the Franklin Institute and learned about the science behind Pixar films. This exhibit was highly entertaining and interesting for both our students and staff. Everyone had a blast! Locally in Mount Laurel, we visited Paw's Farm, and our children were able to learn about, see and even pet compelling creatures such as chinchillas or snakes.



A Message From Our Education Center Director

It has now been over a year that I have served as Education Director at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center, and I couldn't be happier or more proud. We grew together as a community, and I could see our students' reading, math, and writing skills grow due to the academic enrichment we provide.

As we embark on the new school year, we have exciting changes that will bring even greater benefit to the children and families at our center. Kathy Kolesk, a recently retired Mount Laurel Schools teacher, will be working with us to build up our academic enrichment program. Due to time constraints, providing anything but homework help immediately after school for 5th and 6th graders was near impossible. However, we will now provide academic enrichment to this group, with the hope of not only cementing knowledge learned in school, but to also go above and beyond and acquire new skills.

Practicing and building these skills will create a stronger foundation for college. This will be the second year New Jersey uses the PARCC standardized test. It is our goal for every student attending the center to have comparatively better results for this year's scores by being better prepared for the tests, and targeting specific areas of need. We will go over proper nutrition and sleep so our students will have all the tools needed to be successful.



Education Director
Steven Axberg

MEET OUR NEW JESUIT VOLUNTEERS!



Our New JVs Margaret (l) and Meghan (r)

This year we have two new Jesuit Volunteers: Meghan Murphy and Margaret Cowles. Meghan, originally from Denver, CO, is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. She has a degree in civil engineering and is passionate about math, science and dance. This year Meghan hopes to incorporate some awesome STEM projects at Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center. She also wants to bring her love for dance to the center with fun dance classes and yoga exercises. Meghan is ecstatic to be here and has been loving every minute with the kids.

Margaret hails from Spokane, WA and is a graduate of the University of Puget Sound outside Seattle, WA. Her degree is in psychology/

neuroscience with a minor in religion. Margaret is passionate about math/science, French, music and sports. Margaret hopes to incorporate team-building sports, music, and fun science experiments into the enrichment at the Education Center. She also hopes to bring her passion for medicine as an EMT and pre-nursing student to the center exposing kids to limitless career opportunities in health and STEM. Margaret is thrilled to be here and can't wait to start shaping the minds of tomorrow's leaders!

Each year the Jesuit Volunteer Corps provides a full-time youth coordinator to work at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes. Jesuit Volunteers commit to one year of post-college service where the need is greatest and to live in apostolic community with other JVs. Our youth coordinators have come from colleges and universities across the United States including Holy Cross, Boston College, Gonzaga University, Fairfield, Notre Dame, Stanford, Dartmouth, Dayton, Fordham, George Mason, Georgetown, Hamilton, Michigan, Rockhurst University, Scranton, St. Joseph's, St. Louis University, University of Portland, Marquette University, St. Olaf College, and Loyola Marymount University.

Teacher Testimonial

"The Homework Club has been a huge benefit for my students! The staff is always willing to work with teachers to find the best ways to support the children.

My students LOVE going there too! They often talk about how the staff help them with their homework and allow them to have fun, too.

It's a great program!"

—Tori Schmidt
Third Grade Teacher
Hillside Elementary

A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

By Peter J. O'Connor

FSHD's Education Center is dedicated to Margaret Donnelly O'Connor (1914-2005), a true hero who overcame adversity and hardship, never accepted defeat, and was a model of one who promoted education and lived her life for others. Margaret, an

orphan, married, gave birth to two sons, and was deserted by her husband when her boys were two and three years old. As a single parent, Margaret O'Connor sacrificed her entire adult life to provide her two sons, James and Peter, with the opportunity to live in South Orange, New Jersey, attend the best schools (Seton Hall Prep, College of the Holy Cross, Villanova University, and Georgetown Law Center) and develop the values needed to succeed in life. James, now married for 48 years, father of two daughters, and a grandfather of four, retired in December 2004 as Group Vice-President Marketing, Sales, and Service for Ford



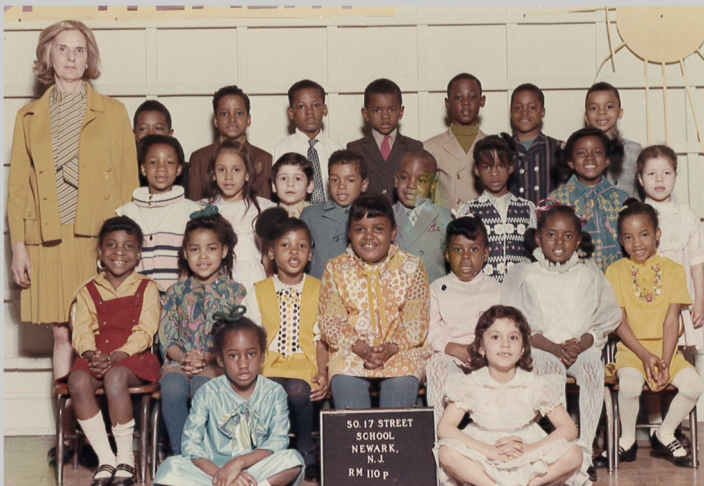
Margaret with sons Peter (left) and James (right)

Motor Company after a 40-year career. Peter, a public interest lawyer, is the Founder and Executive Director of FSHD and Fair Share Housing Center (www.fairsharehousing.org).

Margaret, a graduate of The College of New Rochelle (class of 1937), was an elementary school teacher for more than 30 years in Newark and Orange, New Jersey. She earned a Master's Degree in Education at night at Seton Hall University, worked every summer to make ends meet, and always told her sons: "I will never let you down," and, "No matter what the obstacles are, you can do it." After her sons became adults, Margaret devoted herself to the sick and infirm: reading to the blind on the radio, volunteering at nursing homes and church-related activities in the City of Camden, and joining the Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi in Haddonfield, NJ.



Margaret with James



Margaret with her 1970 elementary class in Newark, NJ

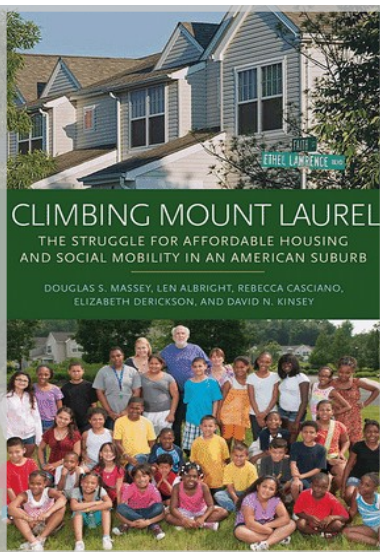


Margaret Donnelly O'Connor
(College of New Rochelle
Yearbook Picture, 1937)



Margaret with granddaughters
Meredith (left) and Erin (lap)

ERLH Offers A “Pathway Out of Poverty”

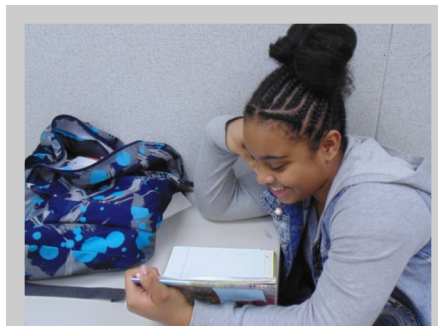


Ethel R. Lawrence Homes provides “a pathway out of poverty” for low-income residents, according to a book published by Princeton University which identified significant benefits associated with moving into FSHD’s flagship development. Among the findings: ERLH residents experienced a reduction in welfare dependency and significant improvements in mental health, personal safety, employment rates, and income levels. Families with children also benefitted from quality academics thanks to a superior school district and an increased focus on classwork and reading by young people living in the development.

Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb is the result of two years of research by Princeton University. Professor Douglas S. Massey, who led the Princeton team, decided to focus on Ethel R. Lawrence Homes because the development was built as part of the settlement agreement in the landmark Mount Laurel case, which is often called the most important civil rights ruling since Brown v. Board of Education.

Massey and his research team surveyed residents of Ethel R. Lawrence Homes to assess their personal, household, neighborhood and school circumstances before and after relocation, then compared them to a similar group of low-income people who applied for an apartment at ERLH but did not get in. The research found that living at ERLH conferred many benefits to residents and saved taxpayer dollars in the process because:

- ♦ Welfare use decreased by 67 percent;
- ♦ Earnings went up by 25 percent;
- ♦ Mental health improved by 25 percent (stress reduced due to safer neighborhood)
- ♦ Rates of employment rose 22 percent;
- ♦ Total average income was significantly higher for ERLH residents (\$26,271) than non-residents (\$21,022).



The high school graduation rate at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center is 97 percent! This compares very favorably with the 49.27% 2012 high school graduation rate in Camden.

“In their new neighborhood, project residents evinced better mental health and achieved greater rates of employment, more abundant earnings, and greater economic independence than they would otherwise have

achieved,” the Princeton researchers said in the preface to *Climbing Mount Laurel*. “It also gave residents more time and energy to devote to the education of their children, and enabled their children to attend higher quality and safer schools while earning grades that were as good or better than what they would have earned in their old schools. For these reasons, we see the construction and management of the project not only as a vindication of Ethel Lawrence’s dream, but as a model for promoting greater integration and a pathway out of poverty for disadvantaged minority families throughout the United States,” the researchers said.

The Princeton research also found NO evidence of increased crime, higher taxes or a decrease in property values for residents of Mount Laurel Township.

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Harold Habein (grandfather of 2012 Education Center JV Abby Habein)
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