MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR

Fall/Winter 2020-2021

Education Center

at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes

COVID-19 Update #1

Connecting
People
Who Care with a
Cause that Matters

Creating a Virtual Safe Space

To help our kids and their families deal with the difficulty of growing up in the COVID-19 era, the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at Ethel Lawrence Homes is now operating a virtual homework club, featuring one-on-one online tutoring as well as a range of enrichment and self-care workshops offered via Zoom. We want our students to have a safe space in which to process challenging topics, including the Black Lives Matter movement and the trauma of dealing with systemic racism, and how to stay safe in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has claimed a disproportionate number of Black and Brown lives.

OUR KIDS NEED YOUR SUPPORT LIKE NEVER BEFORE!



Makayla

Age: 8
Hopes to be: <u>A Doctor</u>

"Virtual Homework Club is great because I get help with my schoolwork and I get to have fun with my friends."



Age: 9

Hopes to be: A Teacher

"I like getting to see and talk to my friends on Zoom!"



COVID-**19** Update #1

PAGE 2

FSHD: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

PAGE 3

Education Director Message Virtual Homework Club Update

PAGE 4

Message from Chantel Young

PAGE 5

Meet Our New Jesuit Volunteers!

PAGE 6

Refusing To Let Our Kids Be Left Behind

A New Database Will Direct Program Planning

PAGE 7

Who Was Margaret Donnelly O'Connor?

PAGE 8-10

Thank You Donors How You Can Help



FSHD: A National Model for Ending 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-

Aerial shot of our new Education & Wellness Center, featuring a playground, basketball courts, and pavilion with two large classrooms and an outdoor picnic area. The new Education Center and outdoor recreation area is expected to be operational in early 2021.

winning flagship development in Mount Laurel Township, provides 176 townhomestyle apartments in a safe environment with access to one of New Jersey's top school districts.

ERLH has long been recognized for setting the gold standard for affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods. Our award-winning development is celebrating 20 years of operations this November 2020!

Building 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.

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 death threats to fight exclusionary zoning in NJ's suburbs. She died in 1994, six years before ERLH opened its doors.

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 (Michael Morris), an Associate Education Director (Chantel Young), an Education & Recreation Coordinator (Kaitlyn DeVeydt) and two college graduate Jesuit Volunteers who provide a year of service (Liam O'Toole and Jackie Kirsch). 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 a now virtual after-school Homework Club and one-on-one year-round tutoring to transform children's lives through educational achievement and enrichment. When the pandemic is over, we will go back to offering a summer camp, which provides academic support in the morning followed by enrichment activities in the afternoon, including field trips to museums, zoos, recreation centers, and sporting events.



A Message From Education Director Michael Morris

Our biggest take away from this pandemic is that we are all stronger together. It's more important now than ever to keep pushing forward and advocating for ourselves, our families, and our kids. Working together, we are capable of overcoming the hardship, the heartbreak, and the oppression that many of us face in our daily lives because of the pandemic.

Being an educator in today's world means facing challenges that I never anticipated when I first started out working with kids. In an afterschool setting, these challenges are even more pronounced as many of our extracurricular activities are also restricted. Here at the

Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center we are approaching all of these challenges one day at a time.

Online schooling definitely takes its toll, but in response we've increased our online presence with video hangouts, one-on-one tutoring, and correspondence with teachers and parents every day all in an effort to better support our families. We have also expanded our *Peter Peso* rewards program and are have an ever increasing selection of fun prizes and experiences to help encourage our kids in these trying times.

We're anxiously awaiting the completion of our new Education and Recreation building and are very excited for all the new programing opportunities this new space will afford us. In addition to gaining two new state-of-the art classrooms, we'll also have access to a playground, a large covered seating area, and two full-sized basketball courts. We're looking forward to using this outdoor space to safely continue working with our kids and their families until the Covid-19 pandemic has retreated enough for us to begin indoor work once more.

We will always continue to work for the betterment of our families, even when that means reconfiguring our entire program. Our work, and the children's work, is exhausting but we're all very hopeful about the future.



Peter Peso Reward Program is a big hit with our students!

What Does Our Virtual Homework Club Do?

Our Virtual Homework Club offers individual tutoring from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. We serve between 50 to 70 elementary and middle-school students, as well a number of high school students. All tutoring is offered via Zoom and scheduled to meet the needs of our students. We also provide a daily enrichment/hangout call each day from 3 to 4 p.m. and encourage children to excel through our *Peter Pedo* rewards program. Prizes include: Hiking Adventure with Mr. Mike, Movie Night provided by MDOC (movie rental, popcorn, candy etc.), Campfire/S'mores Night, Manicure with Ms. Chantel, Karaoke with Staff, or Science Experiment Extravaganza with Ms. Jackie.

We are in regular contact with all of our students' teachers and invite parents to reach out to us via email, Zoom, telephone call or text. Parents are struggling with the new normal. "I honestly can't think of a single parent who hasn't said they are exhausted," says Education Director Michael Morris. "It's put a lot of pressure, especially in homes that feel crowded, to have everyone trying to find a quiet place where they can work and be left alone."

Stress reduction and self-care are top priorities for everyone. "Most parents are worried that even if the grades are OK, they feel their kids are stressed out/mental unhealthy," says Morris. "Being stuck in the house all of the time coupled with all of the stress of current events is really weighing on the minds and hearts of our kids."

Fortunately, our youth are quite resilient. "Most students are pulling it together through a group effort of themselves, their families, MDOC staff, and teachers who care," Morris says. "There is a lot going on but it feels good to get everyone pulling in the same direction. We've had several students who were struggling to turn in work in a timely manner but after weeks of talking with parents, daily meetings on Google classroom, and coordinating with teachers, we're now seeing those students excel!"

"The Homework Club has taught me new ways to deal with my anxieties. I already did some breathing techniques, but I've learned about chakras, using drawing or art to feel calm and healthy eating."

-Katiel, Freshman Lenape High School

Building Organizational Skills and Finding A Quiet Space To Study How We Are Helping Our Students Rise to the Challenge of the 'New Normal'



Greetings from Virtual Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center Afterschool Program. The new school year has started for students and it definitely feels much different than years past. While most students have made the transition from school to fully remote learning fairly easily (having been fully online at the start of the pandemic), this new year has not been without its challenges.

Nearly half of our enrolled students are attending school via the hybrid model, which is a first for them. Hybrid includes a combination of in-school and online instruction with asynchronous learning. For many of our students, the learning curve has been steep. Hybrid learning expects students to be incredibly independent and efficient to successfully manage their school days. Students as young as seven years-old are routinely asked to remember class cohorts, in-school schedules versus remote-learning schedules, and due dates for asynchronous assignments, all while still adjusting to new dynamics at home.

I spoke to one parent recently who admitted that the struggle to balance her job responsibilities with the needs of her two daughters (ages seven and nine) during the school day was affecting her own mental health and productivity. She stated that her only wish was that her girls could be more structured and independent, so she could get some work done. The truth is that she is not alone. Out of that conversation, a simple idea was born that will benefit and support all of our families. If our students need to be more independent and structured, why don't we show them how? Sometimes, it's the smallest changes that make the biggest difference.

Currently, we are teaching these young girls how to use daily/monthly calendars. One of our JVs (Ms. Jackie) made huge wall calendars that the girls decorated (which they loved) and labeled themselves. We had a 45-minute educational session on the importance of keeping a schedule and reviewed each of their current class schedules. The girls are responsible for writing out their schedules everyday and we will provide all of the materials for them to so, free of charge. We will also begin training all of the students that we tutor with this critical organizational skill.

The high school graduation rate at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center is 97 percent!

This compares very favorably with the high school graduation rate in Camden, which hovers around 50 percent.

Another challenge we uncovered is our students are struggling to find a designated study space in their homes. Oftentimes, tutoring sessions are interrupted by the voices of family members or the pressing demands of a younger sibling. I've even had one determined student complete our reading session from a mobile phone while sitting in her dad's car. While I was completely blown away by this student's dedication (she's 8), no student should ever have to work this hard to find space for education. To help, we'll soon be providing noise-cancelling headphones to all enrolled students to literally drown out the noise and make it easier for students to focus. I'm also hoping to expand this by creating a "portable desk," which will include a lap desk, mouse, and supply bag.

We're also continuing our focus on self-care, providing virtual small group activities and individual wellness interventions when necessary to help students manage stress and reduce feelings of isolation. The pandemic may have caused the traditional afterschool program to have changed, but our commitment to our students and families remains the same.

-By Chantel Young, Associate Education and Social Services Director

Socially-Distanced Events Build Pride and Community Spirit









This Fall, the Education Center hosted a Latinx Heritage celebration and a community-wide Reunion, which featured a Get-Out-The-Vote drive and an amazing BBQ. For more information, please visit our website: www.fairsharedevelopment.org

Meet Our 2020-2021 Jesuit Volunteers

FSHD enjoys a special partnership with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, which each year connects us with an extraordinary cohort of college grads who commit to one year of post-college service on the front lines of social justice while living a modest life in apostolic community with other JVs at our townhouse in Camden.

Jesuit Volunteers are aspiring doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, engineers, artists and actors who put compassion ahead of ambition, vowing to spend the year living humbly, sharing meals, engaging in spiritual reflection, and supporting one another all while serving the community and learning to put "people before things."

The amazing young people who have volunteered to advance the mission of FSHD during the 2020-2021 program year, despite the ongoing danger presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, are:

<u>Jackie Kirsch</u> is from Durham, North Carolina. She graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a degree in Neuroscience and Behavior and hopes to attend medical school next year. Jackie enjoys cooking, basketball, and hiking.



Jesuit Volunteer Jackie Kirsch (left) with Education & Recreation Coordinator Kaitlyn DeVeydt (center) and Jesuit Volunteer Liam O'Toole (right)

<u>Liam O'Toole</u>, an Ohio native, attended the College of the Holy Cross and majored in Classics. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, writing, playing the trombone and watching sports. He also has a large collection of fun socks!

In spite of the extra COVID precautions and the many adjustments that will be necessary because we are living through a pandemic, I am looking forward to what I think will be an important year of growth and learning.

I've had a few chances to work with after-school homework clubs in the past and working with young students is always the highlight of my day. Education, especially equal access to it, has long been a passion of mine, so the opportunity to work with the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center and its mission to provide a safe and stimulating environment for the children of Ethel R. Lawrence Homes was something I could not pass up.

Though I'm presently focused on getting to know everyone through programming, it is my goal after my year of service at the Education Center to continue to do work related to education—even if not directly with students. Whether this takes the form of working in academic publishing, continuing with another non-profit, or perhaps entering the classroom, I can't yet be certain. In the meantime, I am so excited to share my own passions for reading, writing, board games, and sports with the Education Center; I am even more excited, though, to learn about the passions and personalities of our students and their families!

—Liam O'Toole

I chose to do JVC because of its emphasis on social justice and community. I was initially drawn to Fair Share Housing Development because of its mission to provide low-income families with affordable housing. I also chose to spend my year of service at the Education Center because I enjoy working with children.



Throughout high school and college, I built relationships with children while working at summer camps, tutoring programs, and my local hospital's pediatric unit as a volunteer. Through my Neuroscience major, I learned about the developing brain from birth through adolescence. I am passionate about supporting children's social and academic needs to ensure healthy brain development, so that they can be successful in the future.

I am currently applying to medical school, with the goal to enroll in the Fall of 2021. Another reason I decided to work at the Education Center was to build on my experience working with children, since I am considering becoming a pediatrician.

Working virtually to educate and support children will require creativity and patience. I am nervous but also excited to start working and contributing to the Fair Share community. I did not want to back out of the JVC experience, though working during a pandemic is challenging, especially because the kids at Fair Share will need more support than ever in their new virtual learning environments.

-Jackie Kirsch

Refusing To Let Our Kids Be Left Behind

Students throughout the Ethel R. Lawrence Homes community have been struggling with technology and remote learning since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly every day, the staff at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center deal with spotty WiFi connections, Chromebooks or phones dying, and the difficulties of using one platform to connect with multiple students. The Education Center has loaned out Chromebooks and chargers, offered a place for free printing and scanning, and held virtual workshops to help parents and students better navigate their Google Classrooms.

But despite everyone's best efforts—including dedicated teachers who email and set aside time for extra Zoom calls, parents who are in constant communication with the Education Center staff, and students who show up to all their tutoring sessions—our children remain at risk of falling behind.



The story of 11-year-old Asir illustrates the challenges young people face today and what can be done to help. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Asir had been an excellent student. His teachers praised his focus, hard work, and insightful comments in class. But when Asir's school shifted to remote learning, things changed for this 6th grader. He was often absent from class, had stopped completing assignments, and was even in danger of failing.

THE GIFT OF OPPORTUNITY

Did you know that a child living in a high-opportunity community like Mount Laurel will grow up to <u>EARN</u> <u>DOUBLE</u> the income of a young person from an impoverished city like Camden. They are also more likely to:

- ♦ attend college
- avoid teen pregnancy & single parenthood
- enjoy better health: including reduced rates of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, depression and anxiety

Princeton University calls our Mount Laurel housing, where the Education Center is located, a "proven pathway out of poverty." Working with Asir's wonderful 6th grade teachers and his family, the staff at the Education Center investigated what was happening. It turns out this 11-year-old boy was struggling with the responsibility of keeping his own schedule alone at home, while his mom, an essential worker/CVS pharmacy supervisor, was at work. We set up a daily tutoring session, to help keep Asir on task, and soon his grades were back up to A's and B's. "Homework Club never let me give an excuse for missing work," Asir says.

Kaitlyn DeVeydt, Asir's primary tutor, praised her student's grit and talent. "Asir has made a complete 180. He is bright, imaginative and an excellent writer." His teacher, Krista Wallace, said the Homework Club was integral to Asir's success. "The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center does a fantastic job in reaching out to the schools to build a partnership to assist students with their daily studies. They have been an asset in helping Asir stay on track with assignments both in and out of school." Jasmine Craig, his mom, also expressed gratitude for the help. "Asir is amazing and very smart! He just needs that extra push sometimes. So thank you for being that extra push and keeping him on track. You took a load off my shoulders and I truly appreciate it."

Asir is living proof not only of the challenges students are facing, but also of the resiliency and strength that come from having extra support like the Homework Club. Without the help of his family (particularly his wonderful mother), his teachers at Hartford, and the staff at the Education Cen-

ter, Asir would've been climbing an upward battle alone. But that's the beauty of a place like Ethel R Lawrence Homes, even in the toughest of times, you are never truly alone. You have a community that's cheering for you, that believes in you and wants you to succeed. Chantel Young, Associate Director of Education and Social Services, said it best: "The pandemic has forced us all to completely reevaluate and rebuild, but that's also when blessings come and the fun begins."

-By Kaitlyn De Veydt, Education & Recreation Coordinator

Data-Centered Programming for Our New Education & Wellness Center



The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center is going digital! We've officially begun our eight-week implementation process with Apricot 360, a comprehensive database that will allow us to track the needs and progress of our students and residents so we can create better programming to best suit the needs of our community, including seniors, differently-abled residents, singles, and, of course, our children and their families.

This data will allow us to get a clearer picture of what the community wants and needs as we expand into recreation and wellness programming. We look forward to offering services beyond academic support and working closely with all of our residents. The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education & Wellness Center is for the whole community, so we'd like to build the programming together.

-By Kaitlyn DeVeydt, Education & Recreation Coordinator

A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor By Peter J. O'Connor



"Mom instilled in us the value of a good education. Peter knows housing alone won't break the bond of poverty. One also needs a solid educational foundation. That's why no other donation comes before my gift to the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center."

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 52 years, father of two daughters, and a grandfather of four, retired in December 2004 as Group Vice-President Marketing, Sales, and Service for Ford 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

-James O'Connor (Class of 1937), was an elementary school teacher for more than 30 years in Newark and Orange, New

"As Peter's 'Irish Twin' younger brother (by 11 months), I have followed Peter's tireless efforts and the tremendous progress of Fair Share Housing since its inception in the 1970s. Mom would be

so proud to see how many people Peter has helped over the last 50 years."

-James O'Connor

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 (far right) with her 1969 elementary class in Newark. New Jersey



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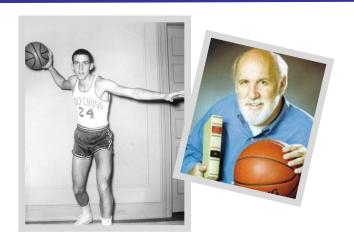
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"Each contribution from a Holy Cross classmate, teammate or fellow alumni reminds me of our days at the Cross, the strong bonds we developed, the commitment we have made to each other through lifelong friendships, and the common values instilled in us by the Jesuits, especially helping the less fortunate."

-Peter J. O'Connor. HC '63

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"It gives me energy and a wonderful feeling of camaraderie to have the backing of my **Seton Hall Prep** brothers."

-Peter J. O'Connor, SHP '59

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Margaret Cowles (2016 Ed Center JV)

John & Abby Finlay (2012 Ed Center JV)

Peter & Theresa Habein (father of 2012 JV Abby Finlay)

Harold Habein (grandfather of 2012 JV Abby Finlay)

Donald & Theresa Harmon (parents of 2017 JV Kathleen Harmon)

Deanna Johnson (2007 Ed Center JV)

Kate Maich (2005 Ed Center JV)

Olivia McCracken (2014 Ed Center JV)

Pamela Parma (mother of 2011 JV Aly Parma)

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<u>Attention: Denise Barricklow</u>

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