

# MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

Spring-  
Summer  
2015

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.



#### Aalia

Age: 11, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Excels at: Math, Reading and Science

Hopes to Be: A Model or a Singer

*"The Education Center is fun! It's a good place to get help with school projects and work out your problems."*

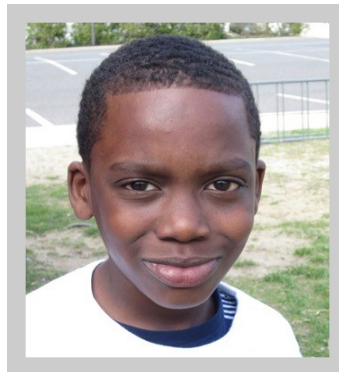
#### Sai'Heem

Age: 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

Excels at: Language Arts and Science

Hopes to Be: An Actor

*"I love coming to homework club because you do your homework and play with other kids who are nice and sweet. I'm also excited for the summer program. You get to do fun stuff like go to the pool and the zoo and a Riversharks game. This summer is going to be awesome!"*



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 **FAIR SHARE**  
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT  
*building homes and hope*

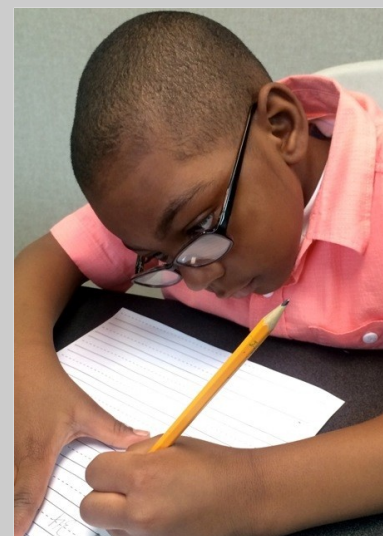
# FSTD: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

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 (Cindy Haas), a college graduate Jesuit Volunteer who provides a year of service (Martha Novotny), and various teen mentors from 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.



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.

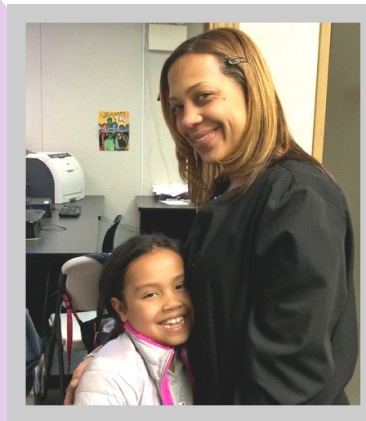


Ethel R. Lawrence is often called the "Rosa Parks of Affordable Housing." A teacher, wife, and mother of nine, Lawrence was renowned for braving racist threats to fight exclusionary zoning in NJ's suburbs. She died in 1994, six years before ERLH opened its doors.

## Parent Spotlight

"I used to live in Camden and decided to move to Mount Laurel when I learned I was going to be a mom. Ethel Lawrence is great because it provides a safe place for my daughter. Alaina gets to be outside and meet the other kids in the community. Considering it is Mount Laurel, the neighborhood is clean, the schools are good, and the parents are involved. The education center is wonderful because Alaina gets to play with her friends and get help with her homework."

—Elaine White, ERLH Parent





# Cindy Haas Bids Farewell to Education Center



Longtime Education Director Cindy Haas resigned in December 2014.

For more than nine years, Cindy Haas served as director of educational programs at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes. She supervised a full-time Jesuit Volunteer, various tutors and a cadre of teen mentors who assisted with our summer program. Prior to joining FSHD, Cindy taught Pre-K and a summer program for a private learning center and substituted for numerous years in a K-12 school district. Cindy holds a BA with high honors in Sociology and Early Elementary Childhood Education from Rowan University.

"Cindy was a dedicated advocate for our children," said Deborah Del-Grande, FSHD's Director of Property Management. "She helped our after-school homework club grow into a highly-regarded enrichment program that has helped many of our youngest residents realize their dreams. Thanks to Cindy's help, we are proud to report that a number of Education Center alumni have succeeded in moving on to college."

Cindy said she cherished her time at ERLH. "Working with children at the Education Center over the last nine and a half years has brought joy and fulfillment to my life. The families and children at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes have become like family to me. It has also been an honor to work for an organization whose mission is to fight for social justice, civil rights, and equitable education."

All of the students at the Education Center join the rest of the staff at FSHD in wishing Cindy well in all of her future endeavors!

## College Workshop and Summer Camp Updates

Our 2015 summer enrichment program includes field trips to see a Riversharks game, a swim trip to Kroc Center as well as visits to the Cape May Zoo and the Franklin Institute. While the mornings of the summer program are largely spent solidifying our students' academic skills, we are happy to include a tactile form of learning in the afternoons. When the sun began to shine a little bit brighter in Mount Laurel and the weather warmed up, we started work on our garden, which is located directly behind the education center. This summer, we will utilize a hands-on approach in our learning techniques by encouraging summer program participants to help grow, care for, and tend to the produce. We hope this experience will help our children to develop a larger understanding of the origins of our food from field to table.

This year's college workshop was a big success! Some 14 young people showed up to hear the presentations by representatives from Temple University and Camden County College who were on hand to answer any questions parents or students had about what it takes to get to college and be a successful student. They discussed student life, academic courses, financial aid, scholarship opportunities, and ways to get involved on campus. Rutgers-Camden was unable to attend the presentation this year, but graciously provided materials that participants were able to pick up and review at their own leisure. Students from grades 7 to 12 were encouraged to start thinking seriously about the steps they need to take in order to explore and one day reach their future goals.



Leniah and Nyla, both 9, working in our summer program garden.

## Message From Martha Novotny, Education Center Director

Homework Club kids of ERLH are an impressive bunch! They are determined to attend the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center daily and use the space as a safe place to learn and grow in a variety of ways. Working with Education Center staff, our students benefit from additional assistance on homework, gain answers on larger concepts regarding course material questions, and find support in both academic and developmental spheres. The staff serves the Education Center's kids with open ears and an open heart. Of course the academic health of each student is greatly important to us and ultimately stands as our top priority, but children simply are not mechanical beings. There are times in which emotions and various levels of maturity may cause moments of frustration and create mental hurdles that a child must overcome. Daily, our staff strives to coach, nourish, and encourage children who find themselves needing additional support. It's not been an easy year for any of our students: there was sadness when Ms. Cindy left and anxiety when it came time to prepare for the daunting PARCC Exam. But our students have proved to be remarkably resilient! I could not be more proud of the hard work, commitment, and determination that the kids have demonstrated throughout this school year.



Martha with Leniah, 9 and Mi'Lan, 7

## Meet Our New Teacher: Jameer Royal



Jameer Royal with Jhalil, 8

Born in Camden and raised in Philadelphia, Jameer Royal has worked at education centers, student-taught at elementary and high schools, directed summer camps, and operated his own tutoring service since the age of 14. Throughout high school, Jameer was committed to volunteering in nonprofit organizations that raise awareness for the homeless, take care of the environment, and provide equal opportunities to less fortunate communities through education and the arts. The day after graduating from

Cairn University with a B.A. in Liberal Arts & Biblical Studies, he was offered a position at Philadelphia Center of Arts & Technology where he was working before he moved to Mount Laurel.

Jameer joined the team at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center early this Spring. "I've worked with kids all over the city of Philadelphia, but these children here are seriously one of a kind," he said. "They keep me on my toes and my days are filled with hilarious moments. The children at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center have so much potential. I believe they will achieve great things." In the Fall, Jameer will head back to school, this time to pursue a Master's degree from Philadelphia University's "Innovation MBA" program.

## Teacher Testimonial

"I've so enjoyed getting to know the kids in a setting less stressful than school and being able to bring that positive relationship into the school setting. I love when I see kids 'get it' and know that I've helped create a love of learning. When I see some of the children that have moved on to high school, I'm as excited to see them as they are to see me! I continue to look forward to celebrating all of their successes!"

—Andrea Figura  
Math Teacher and MDOC Tutor  
Harrington Middle School



# A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly 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 46 years, father of two daughters, and a grandfather of three, retired in December 2004 as Group



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

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](http://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



Margaret with her 1972 elementary class  
at South 17th Street School, Newark, NJ

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.



Peter J. O'Connor with "his" kids  
at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes



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



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

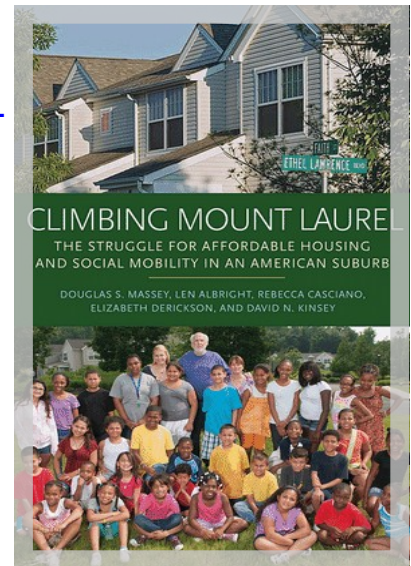


Margaret celebrates her  
85th birthday with her sons

# Princeton University Books Says ERLH Transforms Lives

Ethel R. Lawrence Homes offers low-income families “a pathway out of poverty,” 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. Additionally, ERLH’s residents and the surrounding community were most impacted by the New Jersey Supreme Court rulings (1975 and 1983) known collectively as the Mount Laurel Doctrine.



Massey and his colleagues Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson and David Kinsey 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).

“In their new neighborhood, project residents evinced better mental health and achieved greater rates of employment, more abundant earnings, and greater economic independence that 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 researchers also looked at U.S. Census and administrative data to undertake a time-series analysis of trends in crime, property val-

ues, traffic congestion, taxes, school performance before and after 2000, comparing trends in Mount Laurel to those in surrounding communities. The Princeton research found no evidence of increased crime, higher taxes or a decrease in property values.



Kahlil, 9, is one of several dozen students enrolled in the MDOC homework club at ERLH.



# Thank You Individual and Major Donors

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**Staff of Fair Share Housing Development (2010-2015)**  
Franz and Kristine Wagner  
Kevin and Rosemary Walsh

## JESUIT VOLUNTEERS

Amanda Axeen (2000 Northgate II JV)  
Rebecca Bates (2008 Education Center JV)  
Peter Habein (father of 2012 Education Center JV Abby Habein)  
Harold Habein (grandfather of 2012 Education Center JV Abby Habein)  
Deanna Johnson (2007 Education Center JV)  
Kate Maich (2005 Education Center JV)  
Pamela Parma (mother of 2011 JV Aly Parma)  
**Joel and Christine Stenberg** (2010 Education Center JV)

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**Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center**

Ethel R. Lawrence Homes

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Mount Laurel, NJ 08054