

MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

Spring-
Summer
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.



Mikoyo

Age: 13, 7th Grade

Excels at: Math, Singing

Hopes to Be: A Doctor

"The Homework Club is great because Corey and Steve work really hard to help me with my homework and math problems."

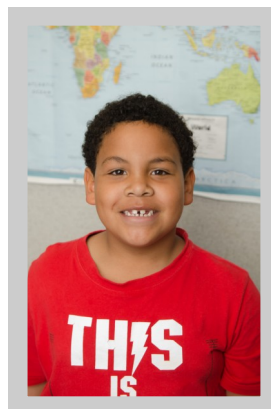
Aaron

Age: 7, 1st Grade

Excels at: Math, Football

Hopes to Be: An EMT

"I love coming to homework club because they help me with my math and reading and we do fun science experiments."



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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.



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.



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.

The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at ERLH is staffed by a full-time Education Director (Steven Axberg), a college graduate Jesuit Volunteer who provides a year of service (Corey Hubbard), 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.

Parent Spotlight

“The Ethel Lawrence Homework Club is a safe and friendly place. They offer extra tutoring for my son to help with his reading and math. It's truly a great program!”

—Catherine Galloway with son Jaden



Building Community with "The Huddle"

By Steve Axberg, Education Director



Everyone has bad days. Some more than others. On days like that, support from our peers is crucial. However, it isn't always easy to express this to those around you in a safe way. This need for a safe time for our kids, staff, and volunteers to express themselves and say where they're at has led to the addition of a new activity which marks the beginning of each day at Homework Club: The Huddle.

Corey and I recently participated in a workshop presented by a Camden-based

nonprofit called Hopeworks. A team of young adults showed us how to implement changes in our program to create a better sense of community. One of the main aspects of their presentation was "The Huddle." In this exercise, each person in the group asks and answers these four questions (see box to right):

This gives everyone an opportunity to see how you're doing emotionally. At first, most of our kids felt it was strange and weren't very supportive of it. However, as time has passed more and more kids are seeing the benefit of this open communication. Some are even practicing it at home! This simple activity can create better communication and build stronger relationships.

1. How do you feel right now?
2. How do you want to feel at the end of the day?
3. What is your goal today?
4. Who can help you reach your goal?

"I Want To Go to College!" – News From Our Higher Education Workshop

By Corey Hubbard, Jesuit Volunteer

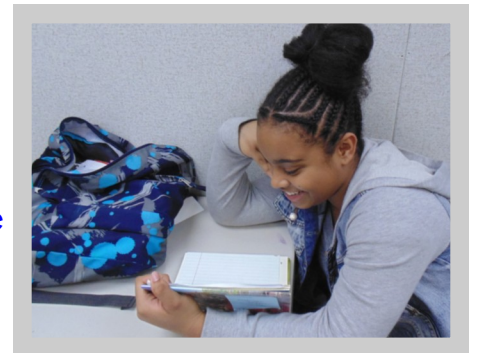


The 2016 Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center College Workshop was a success! We were joined by fifteen students and one parent from Ethel R Lawrence Homes and three representatives from area schools: Camden County College, Rowan College at Burlington County, and ITT Tech. Students learned about the different programs at each school and the steps necessary to apply and pay for college.

A tenth, eighth, and a fourth grader all left the workshop excited about the opportunities with ITT Tech. A parent looking into a Master's degree herself was glad to have her questions answered by the Rowan College representative. Middle-school students were excited to learn about Camden County College and the freedom that comes with a

college education. One student exclaimed, "You mean we can leave campus if we want to? We can make our own schedule? I want to go to college!"

The next step here at the Education Center is helping our high school students with the college search and their applications. We'll keep brainstorming ways to get them to and through college. As for the middle school students, they may not know exactly what they want to study yet, but we'll continue planting those seeds of possibility! It's never too soon to start asking "What kind of education do I need to achieve my goals?" Stay tuned for more news on our higher education efforts!



Message From The Education Center Director

The combination of little to no homework on Fridays, and an interest in hands-on activities has led to our center providing educational and engaging experiments on Fridays for our elementary students. We have gone over topics such as basic engineering concepts, properties of matter, and the components of color.

One of the favorite activities thus far was our Egg Drop activity. Five different teams each used different materials to protect an egg falling from a height of about 12 feet. Marshmallows, duct tape, cardboard, paper, popcorn, and popsicle sticks were just some of the materials used. After they were built, we made predictions as to which vessels would successfully protect our eggs. Making predictions and hypotheses is a crucial part of the scientific method, and gives our kids practice for when they will be running much more complex experiments later on in their academic careers.

Ultimately, only 2 of the 5 vessels worked, but everyone still had a great time. It's amazing to see children so excited to create and build. When creativity and science can be combined in a fun way, the possibilities are endless.



Education Director
Steven Axberg

A Reflection

By JV Corey Hubbard



JV Corey Hubbard

I've always thought I would make a great first grade teacher. By first grade, students have been in school a year already and know (more or less) how to behave, but they still have the energy, imagination, and quirkiness of small children. One of my favorite things is listening to a six-year-old tell a story. The halting, excited, stumbling-over-their-own-words delivery is so charming. So I always thought I was going to be a first-grade teacher. Then I thought

I was going to be a middle school math teacher. Maybe a special education teacher. There were a lot of other "I thoughts" growing up, but I always seemed to come back to teaching.

Thank goodness for this year. I've learned that while I believe I would do a great job as a teacher, planning lessons, managing a classroom, grading papers, tracking benchmarks, and preparing for standardized tests are just not my cup of tea. Yet I remain so grateful for my year of service at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center because my time here has reaffirmed for me that I do want to be around the energetic chaos of children forever. I want to be a part of their growing and changing and learning, just not as a classroom teacher. My dream is to work with children, sitting with them as they live their myriad difficult realities. I want to be there as they learn how to participate in the world as their very best selves. The 'where' for this dream isn't clear yet: maybe a school, maybe a shelter, a group foster home, a community center. Who knows? Even though specific details have yet to be solidified, I am excited to know what I am meant to do.

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! They often talk about how the staff help them with their homework and allow them to have fun, too. It's a great program!"

—Meredith Golick
Hillside Elementary

A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

By Peter J. O'Connor

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



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

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.



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

ERLH Offers A “Pathway Out of Poverty”

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.

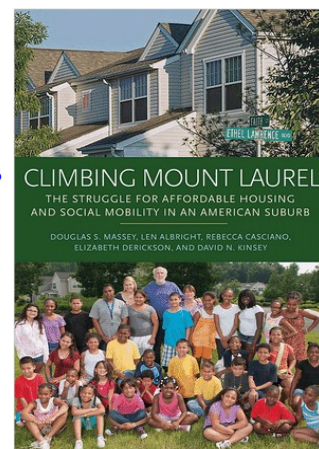
Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb is the result of two years of research by Princeton University. Professor Douglas S. Massey, who led the Princeton team, decided to focus on Ethel R. Lawrence Homes because the development was built as 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 values, 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.



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Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center

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1 Ethel Lawrence Boulevard

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