

# MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

Summer  
2017

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 of 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.



#### Lisette

Age: 10, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

Excels at: Social Studies, Singing & Acting

Hopes to be: Famous Actor/Singer

"My favorite thing about the homework club is the nature activities we do, like when we buried trash to see what would decompose. I also like tutoring because it's fun and helps my grades! My other favorite thing is when we meditate and do the huddle so we can check in and see how everyone is feeling."

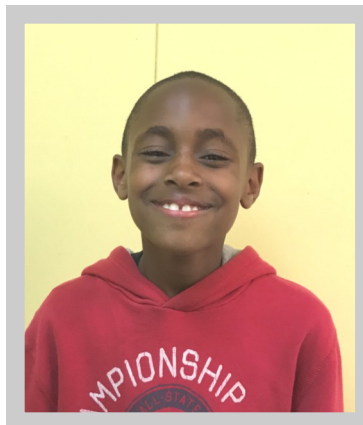
#### Jah

Age: 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

Excels at: Math and Gym

Hopes to: Co-Own A Soda Company

"I like the tutoring I do with Mr. Steve because it's both fun and helps me study for quizzes and tests. One of my favorite activities was when we ran laps and learned about distance and time math!"



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To make a donation, visit  
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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.



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 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 and other programs designed to help teens understand the application requirements and how to apply for financial aid.

## PARENT SPOTLIGHT

"The Education Center is able to help support the academic needs of my kindergarten-aged son, all the way up to my daughter in high school. Jayla and Jalen have been able to get help with projects and for studying, and Jurrious and Jarrious really benefit from Mr. Steve's tutoring while also having a fun and engaging time."

—June Leary, ERLH Parent



PHOTO CREDIT: WilliamDrexel



# MDOC Enrichment Camp Stems the Summer Slide

By Steve Axberg

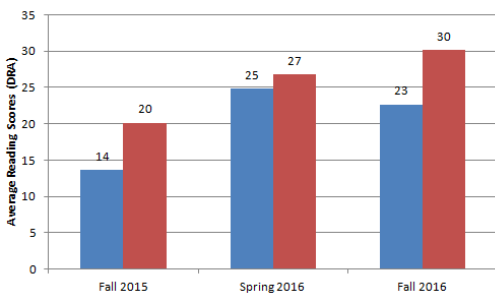
Summer is quickly approaching. That means vacations, Fourth of July, and the beach. For many children, it also means getting not having to wake up at 8 a.m. every day to head to school.

Education professionals also enjoy our summer breaks, too, but we don't like to see the toll a lack of time in the classroom takes on our students. Each fall, teachers will spend roughly six weeks getting their students back in the swing of things once the school year starts again. They also will encounter academic regression.

Studies have shown that this regression, often called the "summer slide," can vary depending on grade level, subject, and family income. In math, students can experience up to 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency loss. For reading, the loss varies across socioeconomic

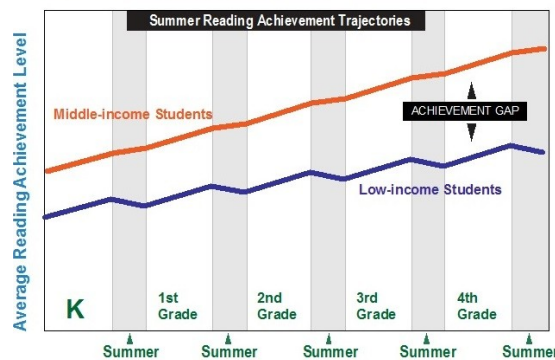
status. Low-income students generally lose about two months of reading achievement over the summer. A study by Ohio State University also shows that the gap for lower-income students grows each year.

Average Reading Scores of MDOC 2nd-4th Graders



We are extremely proud of the effectiveness of our academic program, particularly because we know our students will be more confident at the beginning of the school year. We also introduce some of the new material our students will see in the upcoming school year. These academic gains offer our students a more sure footing with the new material they will be learning. Our goal is to erase cyclical poverty through education thereby ensuring a brighter future for all of our students.

Summer Learning Loss Increases the Achievement Gap



Source: Adapted from Borman, G.D. (2000). The effects of summer school: Questions answered, questions raised. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 65 (1, Serial N. 260).

These findings are part of the reason for our focus on literacy during our Summer Camp. We examined the data for the reading levels of the students enrolled in the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center after-school program and camp. Students who regularly attend our after-school program and summer camp on average saw measurable gains in reading level (*red bar in graph*) while the students who didn't regularly participate in our after-school program and/or experience our summer camp (*blue bar in graph*) saw a decrease in reading level over the summer.

## Crafting Kids Celebrate Their Parents

Ethel Lawrence Homes resident Darcy Daniels is an avid crafter during her free time, often spending hours in her room dedicated to crafting creating fun new projects. Darcy reached out to the Education Center to offer her help and expertise in creating beautifully designed Mother's and Father's Day cards. "I think crafting is a healthy and productive way to deal with stress," said Darcy. "I enjoy teaching the children something new, and hopefully besides the cards themselves, they will take away from the experience that they can create crafts on their own."

Prior to creating the cards, our students participated in a writing activity to help them gather their thoughts for what they wanted to write to their mothers and grandmothers. Next, Darcy provided many different textures so our children could pick out the perfect design for their parents. They were even able to hand-crank the imprinter, and watch their finished creation come out the other side. The cards were a hit with mother Jenyth Ruberte: "I think it's so wonderful that another resident was able to come in and teach something the children in our community how to make something so wonderful, and that the Education Center was able to combine it with a writing activity. That,

combined with the beautiful baskets donated by Mother's Matter made for such a marvelous Mother's Day!"



# A Message From Our Education Center Director

As the school year ends and I reflect on my second full year as Education Director, I think about all of the thrilling changes that have transpired as the program has grown, as well as all of exciting plans for the summer. Our community has grown stronger, and we have reached new heights that were unimaginable at the beginning. And our camp is even better this year!

We have five fun-filled weeks of summer camp, and we intend to accomplish a lot. Our first week, spearheaded by Jesuit Volunteer Margaret Cowles is focused on health/wellness. We know the children will enjoy Margaret's hospital activity, where the children will act out different roles such as doctor, nurse, and patient while using their math, reading, science, and writing skills. The week concludes with a trip to Larchmont Pool, where the children will learn different swimming styles that they can use for exercise in the pool.

Next is our STEM week, which was designed by Jesuit Volunteer Meghan Murphy. The children will be creating their own lava lamps, as well as learning about density. That week ends with a trip to the Franklin Institute, where our children will experience a massive mirror maze and explore the mathematical patterns of the natural world.

Our third week is our Nature-themed week, designed collaboratively by all the Education Center staff. Each grade will be researching their own ecosystem, and then during our trip to Paws Discovery Farm, presenting to the entire camp

what they found about their ecosystem's climate, plants, animals, and human interactions. Additionally, staff from Paws Farm will be bringing relevant animals out during these presentations, such as chinchilla for the mountain ecosystem, or a snake for a desert ecosystem.

The 4th week is our Multicultural week, which I designed. The children will be learning about ancient cultures such as Indian, Mayan,

Chinese, and Egyptian. They also will be learning about the lives of kids their age in these different parts of the world, to celebrate their differences and similarities. Students will also begin writing pen pals in a different country, an activity that both builds writing skills as well as more cultural understanding. Our trip for that week isn't related to the theme, yet is one of the camp's favorites: Funplex!

Lastly, music will be our theme for the fifth and final week. The children will be learning about different music styles, as well as important Hispanic and African-American contributors to music. We will be going to a Trenton Thunder baseball game midweek, and then the summer ends with a BBQ and display of all of the children's work during the summer, including crafts with Mount Laurel art teacher Marcy Morris, and the digital novels the children will have completed. Everyone is invited; we hope to see you there!



Education Director  
Steven Axberg

## Teacher Testimonial

"The homework club supports our students educationally and emotionally. When I've worked with students on mindfulness, and handling their emotions better, they recognize the skills. They say, 'Ms Engel, I learned how to do this in homework club!'"

—Nini Engel  
Hillside Elementary  
School Psychologist



# A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

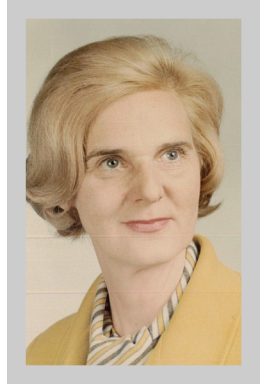
## By Peter J. O'Connor

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 49 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](http://www.fairsharehousing.org)).



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



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.



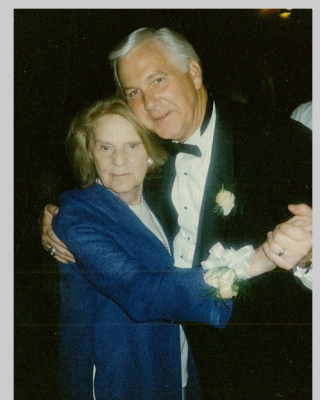
Margaret with granddaughters Erin (far left) and Meredith (to Margaret's left), Judith and James O'Connor, and Peter (far right).



Margaret with her 1967 elementary class in Maplewood, New Jersey

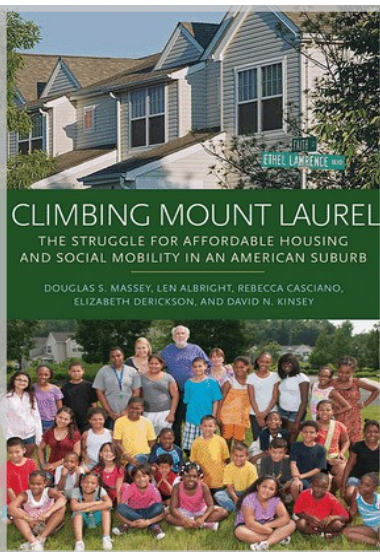


Margaret Donnelly O'Connor  
(College of New Rochelle  
Yearbook Picture, 1937)



Margaret with James

# 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 MDOC Education Center is 97 percent! This compares very favorably with the high school graduation rate in Camden, which hovers around 50 percent.

“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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Mother's Matter is a program run by the **Lauren Rose Albert Foundation**, which is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that was created to honor the legacy of Lauren Rose Albert, a woman who touched the lives of many women. Besides providing Mother's Day baskets to mothers in lower-income families, the organization also provides emergency financial assistance to women and families, education grants, and new and "gently used" career clothing for interviews.

## JESUIT VOLUNTEERS

Matthew and Amanda Axen (2000 Northgate II JV)

Rebecca Bates (2008 Education Center JV)

Abby Habein (2012 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)

Olivia McCracken (2014 Education Center JV)

Pamela Parma (mother of 2011 JV Aly Parma)

**Joel and Christine Stenberg** (2010 Education Center JV)

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Special thanks to the **Food Bank of South Jersey** which has generously agreed to supply ALL snacks for our homework club and summer enrichment camp!

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