

Summer  
2018

# MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

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.



### Heaven

Age: 7

Excels at: Math, Swimming

Hopes to be: A Teacher

"I like the Education Center because we get to do fun stuff and I get to be with my friends."

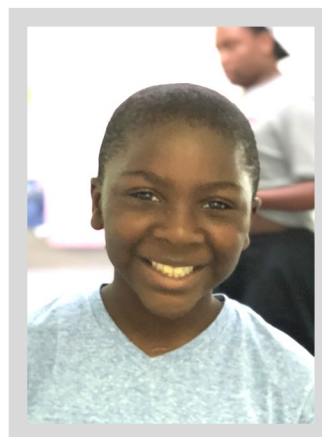
### Quadeer

Age: 9

Excels at: Math, Basketball

Hopes to: A Teacher

"I like that I get to learn, have fun and go on trips all at once."



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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 New Jersey'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 (Michael Morris), an Associate Education Director (Chantel Young) and two college graduate Jesuit Volunteers who provide a year of service (Kathleen Harmon and Andy Beck). 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 a new higher education prep program 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 death threats to fight exclusionary zoning in NJ's suburbs. She died in 1994, six years before ER:LH opened its doors.

## PARENT SPOTLIGHT

"When I found out about the summer camp program I was excited. Summer camps can turn into a major expense. This program has allowed my children to have a great summer experience with their fellow classmates. Elijah and Aaliyah both enjoy going to the camp."

—Casey Fussell with Elijah and Aaliyah (1st grade)



# A Message From Our Education Center Director



Education Director Mike Morris with Raquel

The Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center's Summer Program is back and we couldn't be more excited to dive into an action-packed summer! This year our additional staff has allowed us to provide a higher quality program than ever before. This summer, we will host four clubs and more than two dozen different recreational activities. We will also take six field trips and spend almost 60 hours focused on grade-level education. Our excursions will take us to a mixture of educational and fun-filled locations such as the Please Touch Museum, The Franklin Institute, and the Cape May Zoo. Our goal is to provide a memorable summer experience where learning is enjoyable and exciting for every child in the program.

## Report Offers Insight Into Hopes and Struggles of Our Families

Where do our families come from? What are their children's biggest challenges? What are their dreams for the future? A report prepared by Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center Jesuit Volunteer Corey Hubbard answers these and other questions in a needs-assessment study that provides a first-ever snapshot of the struggles and aspirations of our MDOC families.

Corey, the Education Center's 2015-2016 JV, took on the difficult task of interviewing nearly 30 families in order to glean sociological and academic information about our students as well as their parents. The report found that most of our families are headed by ambitious, hard-working moms, nearly all of whom have continued their education beyond high school. Half of these moms attended some college after high school; a lack of financial aid is cited as the main reason why their dreams for higher education have been interrupted. Other findings:



2015-2016 Jesuit Volunteer Corey Hubbard with Alaina

- A quarter of our moms work two or more jobs to make ends meet.
- Most of our moms are employed in low-paying jobs in the medical field, such as medical assistants (MA) or certified nursing assistants (CNA).
- Nearly a third of our families live below the 2016 federal poverty line (\$24,300 for a family of four).
- Four-fifths have seen an annual increase in earnings of several thousand dollars since moving into Ethel Lawrence Homes. This data is supported by other research which proves that moving low-income families into high-opportunity communities is the best way combat generational cycles of poverty. It also reduces teen pregnancy, increases college attendance as well as marriage rates, and significantly improves adult earning capacity.

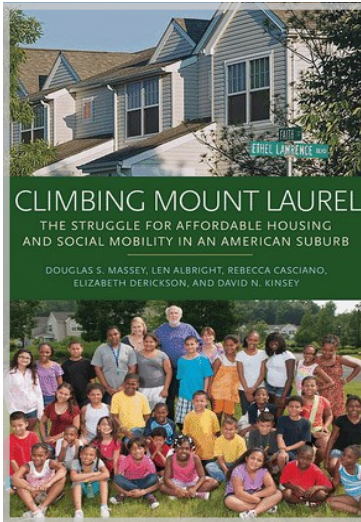
Corey's report also reveals some interesting facts about the strengths and challenges faced by our Education Center students:

- About a fifth of our students struggle in math and/or reading.
- Eight students (20 percent) have been on the honor roll for at least one year.
- Four students are either in advanced classes and/or in the Gifted Education program.
- Fifteen students (38 percent) "take pride in their work and work hard to make good grades and do their best."
- Ten students (26 percent) read for fun.

The parents Corey interviewed offered recommendations to improve the Education Center. We have already implemented a number of these suggestions such as hiring more staff and launching a college readiness program. Parents also wanted more recreational activities. We will soon break ground on a new Outdoor Recreation Area.



# 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.

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.

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).

“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.



# A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

By Peter J. O'Connor



James, Margaret and Peter

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



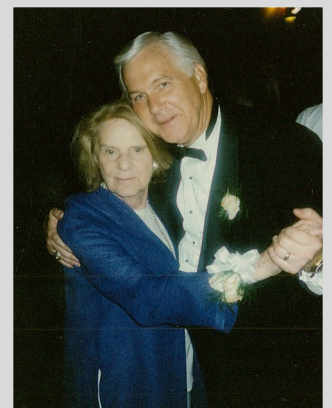
Margaret with granddaughters Erin (far left) and Meredith (to Margaret's left), Judith and James O'Connor, and Peter (far right).



Margaret with her 1967 elementary class  
in Maplewood, New Jersey



James, Margaret and Peter



Margaret with James



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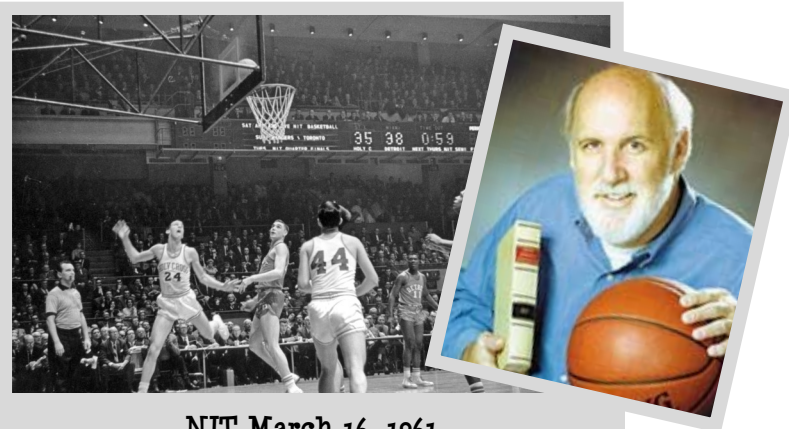
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*Thank You!*

*-Peter J. O'Connor, HC '63*

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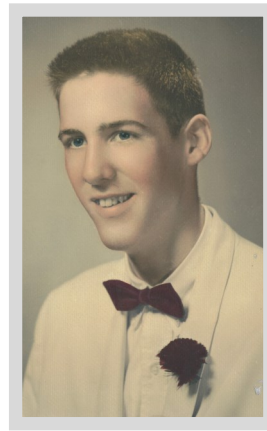
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"It gives me energy and a wonderful feeling of camaraderie to have the backing of my **Seton Hall Prep** brothers."

*Thank You!*

*Peter J. O'Connor, SHP '59*

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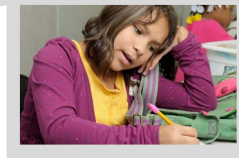
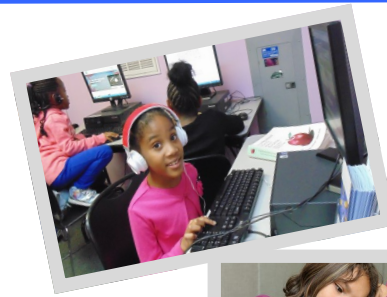
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Mother's Matter is a program run by the **Lauren Rose Albert Foundation**, which is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that was created to honor the legacy of Lauren Rose Albert, a woman who touched the lives of many woman. Besides providing Mother's 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.

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