

Spring
2019

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.



Aaliyah

Age: 7

Excels at: Math

Hopes to be: A Rock Star

"I like learning new things that I haven't tried before."



Avyan

Age: 9

Excels at: Video Games

Hopes to be: A Professional Videogamer

"I like the Education Center because the staff is nice, they give us snacks and help us with our homework."



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Thank You Donors

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

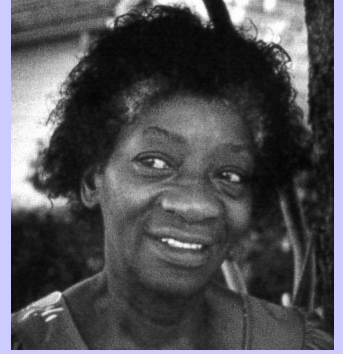


Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties by developing affordable housing in high-opportunity communities. Ethel R. Lawrence Homes (ERLH), our award-winning flagship development in Mount Laurel Township, provides 176 townhome-style apartments in a safe environment with access to one of New Jersey's top school districts. ERLH has long been recognized for setting the gold standard for affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods.

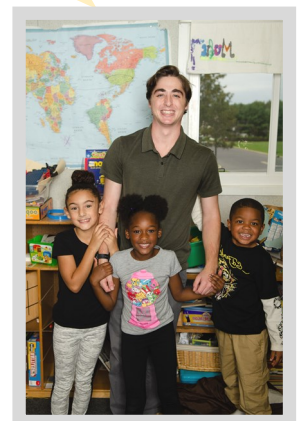
Affordable housing in an integrated community is the first step to helping families overcome problems stemming from generational cycles of poverty, racial segregation, economic isolation, and the lack of a good education. The key to positive permanent change is to

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 (Rebekah DuDevoir, below left, and Peter O'Brien, below right). 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 classes and a new higher education prep program designed to help teens understand 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 ERLH opened its doors.



A Message From Our Education Director

Here at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center we could not be more excited to open our doors to our newest Ethel Lawrence families from Francis Way and Robinson Estates. We're excited to build and expand our program with all of you a part of it. We've already seen new and old students becoming fast friends.

We kicked off February with a month-long Reading Challenge for our 1st - 4th graders and the competition was fierce. Our weekly volunteer, Ms. Mary Starn, created the challenge with our staff and presented it to our kids on the first of the month. Students were asked to read 20 books and challenged to find new areas to read in such as biographies, historical fiction, and comics. Every student who completed the challenge was given a toy of their choice to keep. More than 20 youth participated with some students using all of their free time each day to read. To commemorate the end of the challenge, we held a small award ceremony for our most dedicated readers and commended everyone on their participation.



Education Director Michael Morris
with MDOC student Raquel

We've already started looking towards warm weather with Summer Program planning in full swing here. We aim to increase the number of our enrichment trips this year to help fuel our children's interest in all things educational and recreational. If you have a suggestion or a connection to a possible trip site please let us know.

Jesuit Volunteer Reflection

By Peter O'Brien

Reflecting on the past school year, I have realized how quickly time can pass. It feels like I stepped onto the Ethel Lawrence grounds just yesterday. Now, in the blink of an eye, the year is almost gone. Working at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center has been a crazy ride. Every day is exciting. As soon as the buses arrive, we have an overflowing stream of students in and out of the Center. The students bring their own personalities and stories from the day or the week and I feel very fortunate to have made amazing connections with so many of the kids who walk into our big red double-wide trailer. It's been wonderful growing the connections I have made so far.



I knew I wanted to utilize my love of music and bring it to the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center. Everything from private lessons for the kids to a jam session with the teens has helped me to form a deeper connection and love for the community and the work we do. At the beginning of the year, I ran a music club that slowly developed into private lessons. These lessons become far more than just learning an instrument: they are an opportunity to sit down and talk about what is going on in life, share stories, and truly get to know the person sitting across from me. Watching students cultivate a love

for an instrument and being a part of that has been one of the most rewarding experiences. Music is able to bring together different people from all walks of life and all ages. I have also been able to challenge myself in teaching instruments that I have less experience with, which allows me to continue to grow and learn. From football to fractions, my everyday interactions with the students that walk through the door has given me a wealth of knowledge and a passion to connect with others.

WORDS OF PRAISE

"Volunteering with the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center was one of the most rewarding endeavors I've ever partaken in. The impact that the staff make on these children is evident from the moment one walks in. Between organizing and implementing educational lessons, delivering one-on-one tutoring, and providing physically and mentally stimulating activities, the staff members take time to know and care for each child. For myself, the opportunity to assist with such formative actions was a blessing."

Dylan Reynaud
Harvard University Doctoral Student
Applied Physics


FAIR SHARE
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building homes and hope

Self-Care/Resiliency Workshop A Big Draw for ERLH Families

By Chantel Young, Associate Education and Social Services Director

One of our major 2019 initiatives has been to address the socio-emotional issues of the students. We have previously adopted many trauma-informed practices for students, but are eager to do more.

Our first event this year was a Teen Suicide Prevention workshop, jointly hosted by MDOC and Ethel Lawrence resident Nicole Yancey. The purpose of the workshop was to educate our youth on this important topic and equip them with tangible techniques to promote healing and self-care rather than harm.

The response to this event was overwhelming. More than 35 students and parents descended on our executive conference room for a raw discussion about the issues that lead to teen suicide. Those in attendance were treated to an original one-act play on bullying/suicide by four MDOC students. The keynote speaker for the event was Stacy Williams, a mother who lost her 16-year-old son to suicide almost 10 years ago. The students also heard inspiring words from an Army veteran, one of our middle school students, Jordan Monukaye, and our own Education Center Director, Mike Morris.

The topics discussed included: bullying, school stress, and family relationships. However, the best part of the event was the small group sessions. In these breakout sessions, the students engaged in lively discussions, expressed their fears and frustrations, and debated techniques for self-care amongst themselves. It was great to see students supporting each other and working together.



The feedback for the event was extremely positive. All of the students in attendance said they felt really good about being there and had learned a lot. Based upon this feedback, we'll be following up with some additional topics for the summer.

Learning From Nation's 'Thought Leaders' in After-School Care

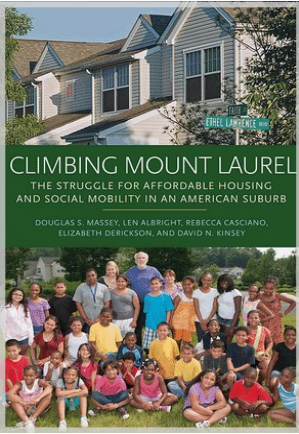
By Mike Morris, Education Center Director

I recently had the privilege of attending the Beyond School Hours Conference, a four-day gathering of educators and leaders serving K-12 students in school, after-school, summertime and beyond. This was an exciting time for me, as I wanted to take as much as I could in and bring it all back to our very own education center.

Over the course of this national conference, held in Atlanta, Georgia, I spent almost 50 hours attending workshops, breakout sessions, listening to speakers, and participating in activities designed by some of the most prominent members of the field. Geoffrey Canada, founder of the Harlem Children's Zone, was the keynote speaker and discussed many of the challenges that our youth today face. It was incredibly inspiring to hear how that, when Harlem Children's Zone was starting out, the premier afterschool program in the country faced many of the same struggles that we face. Spending these days with so many enthusiastic people who have dedicated their lives to out-of-school time (OST) helped rejuvenate my own passion in our program. I hope in the next few months to begin implementing many of the programs I learned of including: meal programs, new data collection, and closer partnerships with community programming.



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. *Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* was published following two years of research led by Princeton Professor Douglas S. Massey. The Princeton team focused on Ethel R. Lawrence Homes because the development was built as part of the settlement agreement in the landmark Mount Laurel decision, which is often called the most important civil rights ruling since Brown v. Board of Education.

Massey and his research team asked residents of Ethel R. Lawrence Homes to assess their neighborhood, school, personal, and household 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 because tenants got to live in a safe neighborhood); and **rates of employment rose** 22 percent. The Princeton research also found NO evidence of increased crime, higher taxes or a decrease in property values for residents of Mount Laurel Township.

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.

A Snapshot of Our Kids and Their Hard-Working Moms



JV Corey Hubbard with Alaina

Our parents shared their hopes and dreams for the future in a first-ever needs-assessment study that was conducted by one of our Jesuit Volunteers. JV Corey Hubbard interviewed nearly 30 families and put together a detailed report about the myriad challenges faced by Education Center parents and their kids. The report found that most of our families are headed by ambitious, hard-working moms whose dreams of continuing their education beyond high school were derailed because they couldn’t afford the cost of college or other professional certification programs. Corey’s report also found that:

- 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 federal poverty line (\$24,300 for a family of four in 2016).
- Most families earn between \$20,000 to \$40,000 a year.
- 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, nearly 40 percent of whom receive supportive services from the Mount Laurel School District, including special education, speech therapy or reading support:

- 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.



A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

By Peter J. O'Connor



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

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 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).

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.



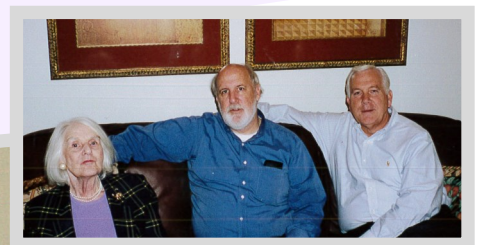
Margaret in Paris



Far right back row, then clockwise: Margaret with James, Peter, granddaughters Erin, Meredith and Judith, Jim's wife.



Margaret with her 1967 elementary class
in Maplewood, New Jersey



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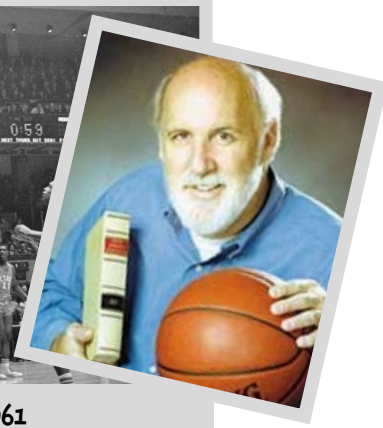
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-Peter J. O'Connor, HC '63

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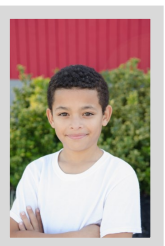
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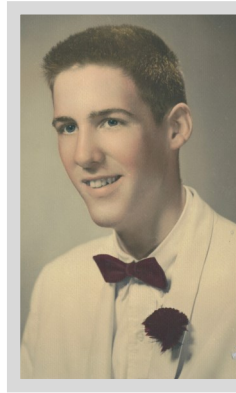
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—Peter J. O'Connor, SHP '59

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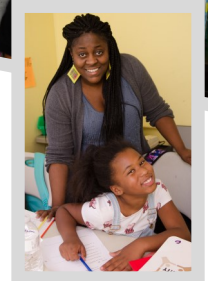
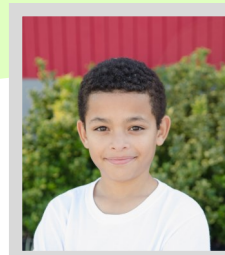
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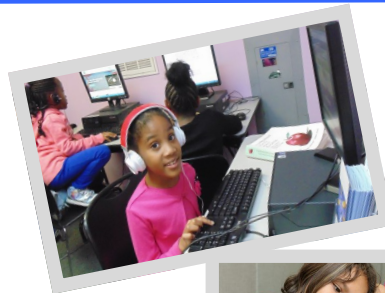
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