

Spring  
2020

# MARGARET DONNELLY O'CONNOR Education Center

at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes

Connecting  
People  
Who Care with a  
Cause that Matters

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.



### Kyleigh

Age: 9

Excels at: Soccer and Minecraft

Hopes to be: A Singer and Police Officer

"Doing my homework at the Education Center is fun."

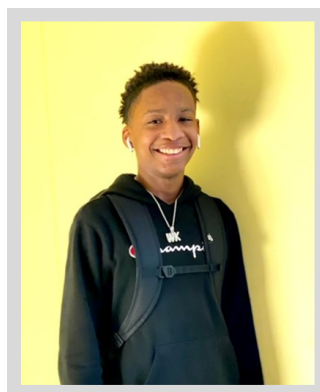
### Jhalil

Age: 14

Excels at: Basketball and Football

Hopes to be: Sports Commentator

"The Education Center is great. I grew up here and really appreciate all the help I got with school from 1st to 8th grade."



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To make a donation, visit  
[www.FairShareDevelopment.org](http://www.FairShareDevelopment.org)

  
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 176 townhome-style apartments in a safe environment with access to one of New Jersey's top school districts.

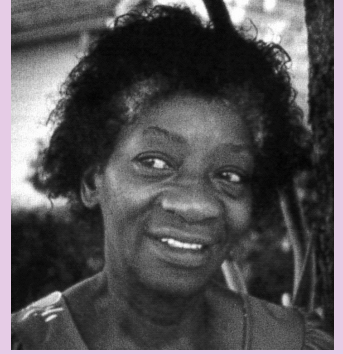
FSHD has expanded our ERLH development, opening a fifth court (36 new rental units) as well as a nearby development in Mount Laurel called Robinson Estates (pictured above), which features 24 beautiful single-family homes, a rarity in affordable housing.

ERLH has long been recognized for setting the gold standard for affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods. Our award-winning development is celebrating 20 years of operations in 2020!

Building 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 (Scott Henderson and Kaitlyn DeVeydt). 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 Education Director Michael Morris

The Center comes alive in the winter as kids try to get out of the cold and find a place where they can feel accepted. Our newest round of clubs have the highest enrollment yet! We've introduced clubs such as Science Club and Self-Care Club and have been overjoyed by the response and involvement. Our kids have jumped at the chance to learn ways they can take better care of themselves and families and they constantly ask to stay late in our science club. They love learning new science fun facts and experiments that they can do at home.

For Black History Month, we celebrated all month long—doing trivia and learning about influential Black icons such as Malcolm X, Claudette Colvin, and Madam C.J. Walker. Our focus on black heroes culminated in an end-of-February event with guest speakers, performances, and prizes all celebrating African-American culture. A highlight of this event was a presentation by Chantel Young on Ethel Lawrence, our very own hero who is the namesake of FSHD's flagship development.

As we start to look towards spring and summer, the Education Center aims to raise the bar in terms of the content and experiences we offer during our Summer Program. This year we're continuing our weekly field trips, daily morning education classes, and may soon feature local educational experiences. Our goal is to enrich our children's lives with new experiences and we're proud of our track record of continuously growing the program over the last three years.



Education Director Michael Morris with MDOC student Davia.

We are delighted to report that Mike recently got married! Our kids and FSHD staff all wish Mike and his wife Sara many years of happiness together!

## Jesuit Volunteer Reflection

By Scott Henderson

More than halfway into my year working at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center at Ethel Lawrence Homes, I cannot believe how quickly the months have flown by. When I first heard about the work that Fair Share Housing strived to do—providing affordable, community-based housing to low-income individuals and families—I was struck by its important mission. I have been inspired by the passionate individuals who work for this organization, as every employee goes above and beyond their role's expectations, with a common goal to provide the best care and support for every member of this community. Further, I have been incredibly moved by the parents of our students who so generously offer their kindness, gratitude, and warmth to the entire community. It's clear what a pivotal role parents and other adults in the Ethel Lawrence Homes community play in the lives of our kids. Despite the many challenges that our families face, so many of our parents continue to be present, attentive, and involved.



The children at the Education Center have captured my heart. When I met them last summer, I could not have imagined the amount of joy I would receive from all of the students. Something that continues to impress me is the children's willingness to accept two new Jesuit Volunteers every year with open arms. Before starting my position here, I imagined there would be resistance from the kids in wanting to get to know me as the "new JV," as I was replacing someone that they had gotten to

know well and respected. Despite having to repeatedly develop relationships with new JVs every year, the kids are always welcoming, gracious, and willing to open themselves up—and I consider that to be such a special gift. I feel honored I'm able to work with kids who have unyielding passions, strengths, and potential. To be able to play even the smallest role in supporting our kids makes every day worthwhile. Whether it is helping a student understand how to add fractions or discussing acts of bullying going on at their school, I am grateful to be able to enter into that space with that child and simply be with them in those moments. Our kids radiate such light and energy into the world around them, and I cannot wait to continue to see them grow and flourish throughout the rest of my year here.

## WORDS OF PRAISE

"I always feel welcome when I come to the Education Center. Everyone goes above and beyond to be accommodating. DiDi likes going to Homework Club because the teachers are informative and patient."

—Jackie Crespo, ERLH Mom



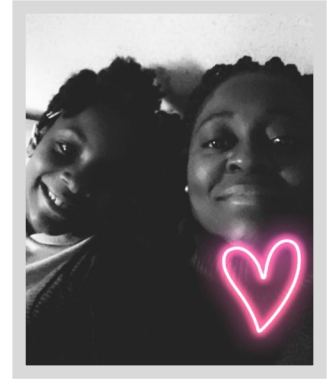
## A Message From Chantel Young

Associate Education and Social Services Director

Driven by the mantra that all are welcome, we have worked hard to maintain a welcoming, friendly, bully-free zone. The students have been hard at work mastering various literacy and math curriculum—and we have been working just as hard to support them in their educational endeavors. We also began working on new social initiatives that we're confident will help build character so our kids can become happy, healthy and productive members of our society.

Life at the center has not been all work though. What brings me the most joy is the informal interactions with our students and watching them at play. It's amazing to hear the thoughts and see the natural gifts of society's budding artists, doctors, and engineers unfold. Generation Z will be a force to be reckoned with guaranteed. I continue to be humbled and appreciative to be a part of their journey.

—Photos Chantel Young



### Girl Code Bootcamp

Almost every woman has a story where they've leaned on the other women around them, often strangers, and have seen and felt the power of "Girl Code," a set of unwritten rules meant to uplift kindness and solidarity. Every Tuesday, our K-4<sup>th</sup> graders gather together with staff and some of our older girls to discuss the Do's and Don'ts of Girl Code, a new workshop that Chantel and I recently kicked off. Our topics include: Respecting Boundaries/Healthy Relationships, Bullying, Bystander Effect/Peer Pressure/Snitching, Social Media: Blocking Out the Haters, Comment Culture: Can-Do's & Can-Don'ts, and Conflict Resolution/Restorative Circles.

Thanks to the help of our older middle school ladies, we've had a successful few weeks full of role-playing, discussion, and friendship. Being a young woman is a challenge and we hope to equip our girls with the tools, relationships, and strength they need to make their own way.

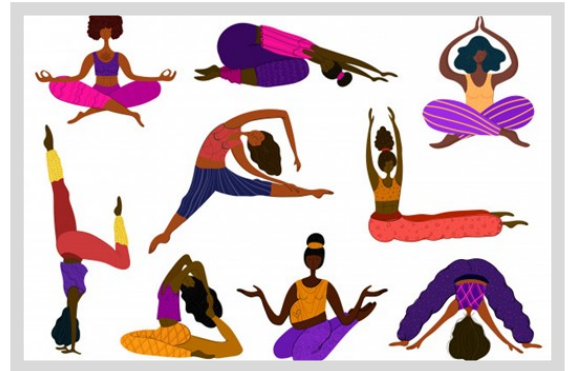
—By Kaitlyn DeVeydt



### Our Littlest Yogis Learn About Chakras

By Jesuit Volunteer Kaitlyn DeVeydt

"You're messing up my chakras!" sends a ripple of giggles through the room. Everyone is bent into their own beautiful version of downward dog, playing in the posture. For me, yoga has been a love, a lifeline, and a friend for the past five years. Whether you agree with the power of yoga or not, there is no denying the exceptional effects it has had for me and for my small group of mini yogis. My first yoga class began at the base, literally, with an overview of chakras. In yoga, chakras are seven energy points that run from the base of our spine up to the crown of our head; certain chakras are associated with specific colors, emotions, body parts, and even foods! For a child (myself included!), they're a wonderful way to simplify the physical world we embody. In a society where we're bombarded with images and feeds and comments, the chakras bring us back to seven simple points: Home, Play, Strength, Love, Voice, Wisdom, and Spirit. However, knowledge of this yogic stripping down was a privilege afforded through years of counseling and classes, and while I am in no position to counsel our kiddos, it's been a blessing to offer them yoga this past year—to see a group of jumping beans look forward to lying in meditation for the last fifteen minutes of class, to discover what essential oils make them feel most at home and at peace in their bodies, and to enjoy moving our bodies together in a safe space.



Figuring out who we are and what "makes sense" for our bodies, what yogis call our "inner teacher" or "gurudeva," is a journey we all understand. The practice of yoga is a way for us to literally feel out what feels good, what is "too much" for us, and what does it mean to focus only on the here and now. I loved laughing with my mini yogis as they mooed in Cow Pose and then hissed in Cat Pose. I loved watching them affirm themselves and each other in our post-class chats. I loved seeing peace wash over their tiny, beautiful faces during final meditation. I've learned so much from these kids—how to laugh at myself, how to play in a pose, and how to truly relax in a space—and I can only hope that in times of anxiety or worry, they return to the seven simple yogic points and remember that nobody has the power to really mess up their chakras! (Kaitlyn's yoga workshop took place last fall at the Education Center.)



## Building Community Through A Mentoring Program for Boys



Every few months at the Education Center, we host a “Boy’s Night” event. We invite any boys, ranging from kindergartners to twelfth graders, to attend. Our aim in hosting these nights is to provide a space for our male students to discuss what masculinity means, how that manifests in their daily lives, and to share both their struggles and privileges related to their male identity. We break out into smaller groups of distinct ages, so that the conversations can be tailored to the children’s maturity and current stage of their lives. Further, we ask fathers and other male members of the community to facilitate the different groups of kids. We believe that mentoring and having strong role models is an essential component in the development of our children, and so we strive to provide a strong connection to older members of the community. We are impressed with the willingness of our kids to engage in these discussions, as they often ask, “When is the next Boy’s Night going to be?” and are excited to be there when we do host these events. We hope these spaces allow our students to discuss their experience growing up as a male and serve as a reminder to our boys that they are supported by the entire Ethel Lawrence Homes community.

—Scott Henderson

### Nearly 100 Residents Turn Out To Celebrate Black History Month

On February 25, 2020, the Margaret Donnelly O’Connor Education Center hosted its first annual Black History Month Celebration. The evening kicked off with some delicious food which included everything from fried chicken and Mexican rice to Philly Pretzels. During the entire month of February, the Education Center walls boasted famous and “hidden” black figures. Capeless Heroes were revealed, highlighting writers (Gwendolyn Brooks and Frederick Douglass), performers (Duke Ellington and Ethel Waters) and activists (Annie Lee Cooper and Ruby Bridges) who’ve helped pave the way for people of color. A special “Thank You” to Ali Richardson, a Philly-based musician and educator, who shared his knowledge on the history of music in black culture and gave us an opportunity to sing and dance our blues away. In addition, the neighborhood’s namesake hero, Ethel R. Lawrence, was especially celebrated and remembered! With an advanced screening of the forthcoming documentary on her life and legacy, residents were reminded of the difference one person can make in the community and the world. We honor Ethel Lawrence and the countless named and unnamed heroes of color who’ve made our world a more just, peaceful, and beautiful place for everyone.



—Kaitlyn DeVeydt

## Where Are Our Grads Now? New Database Will Track Educational Outcomes

Something that we recognized as missing from our records here at Fair Share Housing was a comprehensive database of alumni who’ve attended our center. We wanted to gain a better idea of where our students and families are currently living, their occupations, educational pursuits, and so forth. We strive to support our students and families in any manner possible, and we think maintaining a collection of information regarding where our graduated students are and what they are doing is essential.



In order to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of both the challenges our families face as well as the triumphs experienced by our students, we have begun to contact parents of our student alumni. During these conversations, we ask our parents to share their childrens’ current employment, residence, educational pursuits, as well as their experience living in Ethel Lawrence Homes and the greater Mount Laurel community. We are incredibly grateful for our parents who so vulnerably and generously shared both their child’s and their own experiences of living in this community, and it has been incredibly beneficial to bear witness to their stories. We asked our parents to share both the positives and negatives of their realities living as part of the Ethel Lawrence Homes community, as well as what suggestions and feedback they may have regarding the Education Center. We aim to fully support our students in every

facet of their life, and we are thrilled we have had this opportunity to get a better understanding of what has gone well at the Education Center, as well as how we can improve the services and programs we provide.

—Scott Henderson

# A True Life Hero: Margaret Donnelly O'Connor

By Peter J. O'Connor



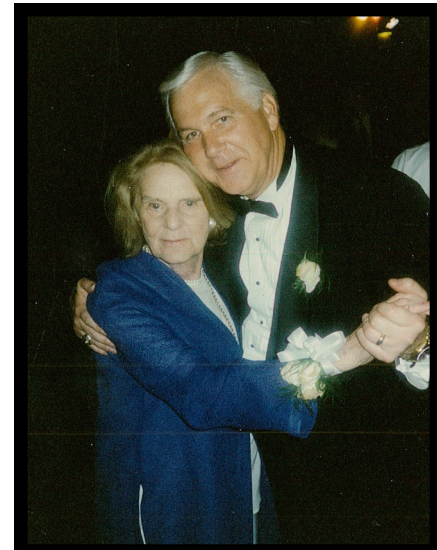
"Mom instilled in us the value of a good education. Peter knows housing alone won't break the bond of poverty. One also needs a solid educational foundation. That's why no other donation comes before my gift to the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center."

—James 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 51 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.



"As Peter's 'Irish Twin' younger brother (by 11 months), I have followed Peter's tireless efforts and the tremendous progress of Fair Share Housing since its inception in the 1970s. Mom would be so proud to see how many people Peter has helped over the last 50 years."

—James O'Connor



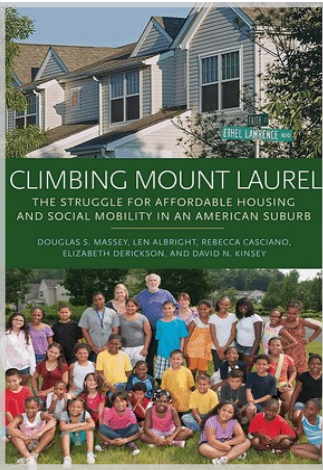
Margaret with her 1967 elementary class in Maplewood, New Jersey



Far left back row: Granddaughters Erin & Meredith, Judith (Jim's wife), Margaret.  
Front row: Peter (l) and Jim (r).



# 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 litigation, 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 interviewed residents of Ethel R. Lawrence Homes in order 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 decreased 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.

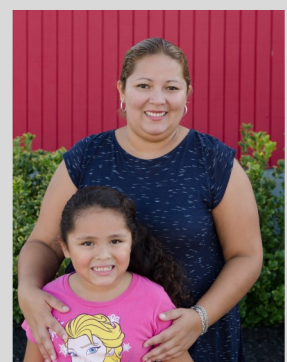
## A Snapshot of Our Kids and Their Hard-Working Moms

Our parents shared their hopes and dreams for the future in a needs-assessment study that was conducted by a former Jesuit Volunteer. 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.



JV Corey Hubbard with Alaina



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.”
- Ten students (26 percent) read for fun.
- Eight students (20 percent) have a “particular love for learning” and a “deep curiosity.”
- Eleven students (28 percent) have “creative skills” at advanced writing or making art.

# Thank You Individual and Major Donors

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"Each contribution from a Holy Cross classmate, teammate or fellow alumni reminds me of our days at the Cross, the strong bonds we developed, the commitment we have made to each other through lifelong friendships, and the common values instilled in us by the Jesuits, especially helping the less fortunate."

—Peter J. O'Connor, HC '63

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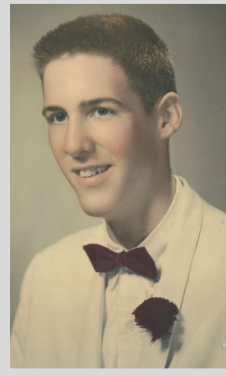
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"It gives me energy and a wonderful feeling of camaraderie to have the backing of my **Seton Hall Prep** brothers."

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

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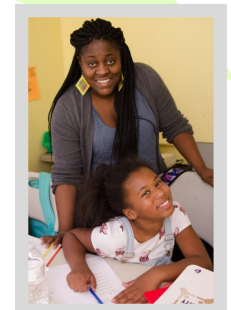
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