

MARGARET DONNELLEY O'CONNOR
Education Center
at Ethel R. Lawrence Homes

SUMMER 2020—Update
Responding to the Crisis



Thanks to the support of FSHD's loyal donors, we are continuing to deliver services and keep the children who attend the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center on the track to success, despite the switch to remote learning that will likely continue into the 2020-2021 school year because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Our school district, like many others across the nation, is still trying to figure out how to move forward in the crisis — we will keep you updated as the academic year progresses. It's an unprecedented time for educators. In too many U.S. towns, school districts lack the funding to supply their students with computers and many families don't have access to the Internet.



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Our children are among the lucky ones. The Mount Laurel School district has provided each and every student with a Chromebook computer, which allows them to access their online classrooms, as well as the enrichment programs offered by the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center.

Experts are deeply concerned the shift to remote learning will widen persistent achievement disparities across income levels and between white students and students of Black and Latino heritage. Studies show that four out of 10 low-income children who did have access to computers only accessed remote learning once a week.

Our staff worked hard to ensure this didn't happen. Last semester, they set up Google classrooms, Zoom calls and used FaceTime as well as phone calls to try to keep our students on track. To help kids deal with social isolation, we hosted a range of digital events, including yoga, trivia contests, music parties, Tik Tok challenges, video game hangouts, Boys' and Girls' nights and a number of "self-care" Zoom sessions. Most of our students handled the transition to distance learning quite well, but stress management remains a hot topic (*see back page to learn more*).

"We are uncertain what the Fall will bring but we are preparing a physical program, an online program, and a hybrid program to cover all of our bases," says Education Director Mike Morris. "We will continue to strive to provide the best for our students regardless of how our country is faring."

For the first time since its founding, the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center did not host an in-person summer enrichment program in June and July. Instead, we offered one-on-one tutoring sessions to help our students avoid the "summer slide" in learning.



THANKS TO ALL OF OUR DONORS FOR EMPOWERING OUR CHILDREN TO REALIZE THEIR DREAMS!

Associate Education Director Chantel Young Reflects on Creating a Virtual Safe Space for Our Kids

The staff at Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center has been grappling with how to best support our children through the COVID-19 pandemic and the burgeoning 21st Century Civil Rights movement. Too often, I believe we adults underestimate the impact of these challenging times on our youngest citizens. Students are being bombarded with news and information from TV and social media about serious topics including illness, social justice, and racism, yet they may be unable to process it all. Our goal at the Education Center has been to provide honest information (correcting misinformation) in a nurturing environment. For example, during one of our self-care Zoom sessions, one of our students expressed concern for her uncle who is a State Trooper. In a supportive environment, we explained the reason behind the #BLM protests and also validated her feelings regarding her uncle.



COLLEGE UPDATE: While many of our MDOC alum are taking a gap year due to safety concerns, we're proud to announce that two of our graduates will be attending college out of state.

One parent, whose daughter Dashira will be attending Bethune-Cookman, a private, historically black university, said: "I am so proud of my daughter. I am worried about the pandemic, but I don't want her to miss out on this opportunity."

We share her cautious optimism and remain committed to continuing to find appropriate, culturally sensitive ways to serve our youth.

We also agreed a safe space was needed for our children to be able to process the protests spearheaded by the Black Lives Matter movement.

With these two critical goals in mind, our virtual homework club was born. At first, we figured that the majority of our work would include homework help and tutoring. We soon realized that most of our students, especially our teens, had transitioned to remote learning pretty easily.

Our main work turned to teaching our students how to manage their stress. Our children were sad about missing proms and senior trips, and they expressed anger about the injustices suffered by communities of color. A small group online curriculum was designed which utilized music, drawing, computer games and treasure hunts to teach our kids how to practice emotional self-care in their own spaces. The children loved the

virtual activities, all conducted through Zoom. One 8-year-old student later told us she'd shared one of our team building activities with her family. Without a doubt we will continue to be there in every way for our students.

The year was also very challenging for Jesuit Volunteers Scott Henderson and Kaitlyn DeVeydt, who had to end their 2019-2020 year of service remotely.

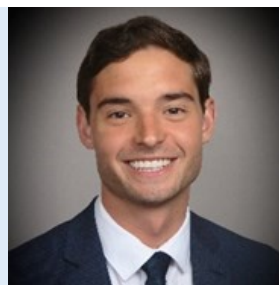


"Working from home, particularly during a pandemic was not easy, but routine, list-making, and the smiling faces of MDOC staff and students (mostly virtual), has made the time both productive and rewarding. Though not the same as on-site service, I've loved finding creative and

innovative ways to serve the Ethel R. Lawrence Homes community," said Kaitlyn DeVeydt.

Scott is heading off to medical school, while Kaitlyn has accepted an opportunity to stay on at the Education Center as a full-time member of the team. We are so excited for both of these mission-driven young adults!

Jesuit Volunteer Scott Henderson was accepted into five different programs and will be attending Kaiser Permanente School of Medicine, a new school in Los Angeles that is opening this summer. Scott chose Kaiser because he wanted to be part of the inaugural class. He is among the prestigious cohort of students whose tuition is being waived by the school for the years 2020-2024.



We are certain Scott will bring his intellect, passion, and heart to the school, just like he did at the Margaret Donnelly O'Connor Education Center. "I was supported wholeheartedly by my fellow MDOC/Fair Share staff members throughout my entire application process, which I was so grateful for," Scott said. "I will miss my time, co-workers, and of course, the students at MDOC dearly as I continue my career. I hope to visit soon!"

Thank you, Scott for giving us an incredible year filled with magic tricks, fun science experiments, and so much more! We will never forget you and wish you the best in your future endeavors.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

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