

## 38,752 residents living in poverty: County 'numbers keep getting higher and higher'

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As the population of Chicago's collar counties skyrocketed over the past two decades, so did the region's poverty rate.

According to a newly released study by **Heartland Alliance**, the region's poverty rate has grown in line with the population since 1980.

From 1980 to 2006, the Chicago-area poverty rate increased from 11.1 percent to 11.8 percent. Lake County saw a slightly smaller increase, going from 4.9 percent in 1980 to 5.4 percent in 2006.

It's estimated that 38,752 of Lake County's 713,016 residents are living below the poverty line, said Amy Terpstra, a research associate with **Heartland Alliance's** Mid-America Institute on Poverty. That Chicago group focuses on increased funding for the poor. In 1980, roughly 22,000 of the county's 440,387 people lived in poverty.

Heartland attributes lack of quality jobs among the main reasons for the steady level of poverty, said Amy Rynell, director of the Institute on Poverty.

Roughly one-third of all jobs in Chicago's collar counties are low-wage service industry jobs, which pay below \$30,000, Rynell said. The influx of immigrants had little to do with the poverty increase, the study states. Non-immigrants have a poverty rate of 11.6 percent.

Cedric Lee doesn't need statistics to tell him the poverty problem isn't going anywhere. The director of communications for PADS Crisis Center in Waukegan said his agency is seeing a constant influx of poor. "They're not going away any time (soon)," Lee said. "Our numbers keep getting higher and higher."

While the Heartland Study uses 2006 statistics as its most recent data, Lee said the numbers are only getting worse. In this fiscal year, PADS has already assisted more than 830 people, Lee said. In the 2003-04 fiscal year, the agency assisted 515 people.

Like Heartland, Lee attributed the increase to a lack of quality jobs. And also to a lack of revenue for programs that assist the poor.

Getting assistance is something that Heartland is working on. The group is promoting two bills that could assist poor families. The first would improve income tax credit programs. The second, which is awaiting approval by the Illinois Senate, would create a commission to focus on poverty. The goal of the commission would be to cut poverty in half by 2015, Rynell said.