

**Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County**
2107 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
(239) 258-3450
www.swfljac.org

December 2014

The JAC Perspective

Happy Holidays from the JAC Staff!



The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.

Free drug testing kits for your youth are available at the JAC 24 hours a day.

Law enforcement should call ahead to

**258-3461
or 258-3471**

when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC or to confirm that a youth is eligible for a civil citation.



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Families Still Struggling

Pay the rent or pay the car insurance premium this month? Spend time with the kids or get a second or third job to help feed them? These are the hard choices that many struggling families in Lee County face every-day. Although there have been a few economic indicators suggesting that the local economy is starting to turn around following the Great Recession, the true magnitude of financial instability in the community left in its wake may have been underestimated. A recent study by the United Way of Florida, also called the ALICE Project (an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) looked at employed households that had incomes over the federal poverty threshold but were under the bare minimum needed to survive based on the local cost of living. The bare-minimum survival budget factors in local housing costs, child care,



More than 7 out of 17 households in Lee County live below a basic survival budget.

food, transportation, health care, taxes, and miscellaneous expenses. For Lee County the annual survival income for a single adult is \$20,443 and \$48,696 for a family of four with child care costs.

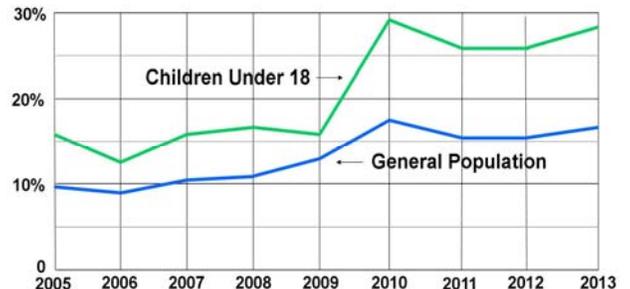
In Lee County 42% - or 101,789 households - are living below the basic survival budget. While this level of income affords a very modest living, it is well above the federal poverty threshold of \$11,170 for a single adult and \$23,050 for a family of four. The survival budget doesn't

allow for any savings, leaving these families vulnerable to any unexpected expenses. They are one crisis away from falling into poverty. Families living with less than a basic survival income are less likely to get preventative health care and are more at risk for having health issues. This can lead to increased community costs for emergency room visits and greater
(Continued page 2)

Effects of the Recession on Poverty in Lee County

The effects of the Great Recession - which officially lasted from December 2007 to June of 2009 - were dramatically evident in Lee County (see figure right). 16.5% of Lee County's population was living in poverty in 2013 compared to 10.3% before the recession began. Children, in particular, were affected. In 2013, 27.8% of children under 18 years of age in Lee County were living in poverty compared to 13.4% in 2006.

Percent of Population Living in Poverty in Lee County, 2005-2013



Source: American Community Surveys 2005-2013

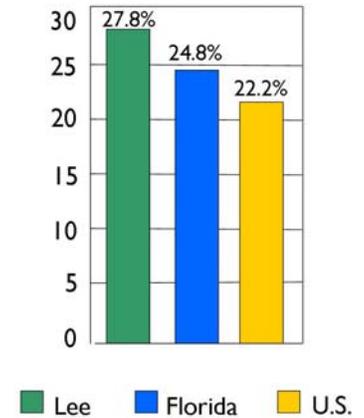
Families Still Struggling (cont.)

absenteeism at work and school. Conversely, employees in jobs with no sick leave who are struggling to make ends meet may show up to work ill, exposing others to their illness. Children from low income households are less likely to be ready to start school putting an additional drain on the local school system. Students from low income homes are significantly less likely to graduate from school. As school dropouts they are likely to have fewer employment opportunities and to face depressed wages. This combination of factors makes them more at risk for engaging in youth crime. Neighborhoods with higher rates of struggling families are more at risk for becoming unstable neighborhoods that are vulnerable to increased crime, violence, gangs, and victimization. The proportion of barely surviving, struggling households in various

communities throughout Lee County ranges from 16% to 91%. Many of these struggling households remain invisible to most as they are interspersed throughout the county, including some in what are typically considered middle class communities. They are made up of the service people who wait on you in the checkout line or service your car. They include the servers who wait on your table. They are your neighbors. The ALICE Project rated each county on the level of community support it provides to these barely surviving families on a scale of worst to best. Lee County was ranked as fair. In other words, we can do better as a community in supporting our struggling families. In this season of giving, please consider giving to a local charity of your choice. There continues to be great need in Lee County, especially among families

with children. The ALICE report is available at www.uwof.org/alice.

Percent of Children Under 18 Living in Poverty, 2013



Source: U.S. Census

One Wish

Commercial advertisements bombard us this time of year telling us what we should buy, trying to convince us they have the answer to finding *the* perfect gift. A tradition for some parents this time of year is to ask children to make a list of the gifts they would like. What if the question was asked differently? If children could have one wish of something they would like from their parents, how would they answer? A few years ago one of the JAC's community partners asked that very question to youth in their afterschool program. The majority of the youth wished for things that money can't buy. Some wished that their



parents would respect them more. Some wished that their parents would listen to them more. Some wanted their parents to talk to them more. Most wished that their parents would spend more time with them and spend more quality family time together. As we approach this holiday season, *The JAC Perspective* reminds our readers that not all gifts we give to our children can be purchased. Spending time with youth, taking time to talk, taking time to listen, making time for family meals and other family activities, and being emotionally

available to our children, are gifts we can give to our children every day. We don't have to wait for special occasions. In doing so, we may be giving our children the gift that they want and need most of all.

Gang Prevention

"Why Youth Join Gangs" is an online video from the National Gang Center featuring gang researchers, practitioners, and young people who were previously involved in gangs. Research is presented about the risk factors that either push or pull youth into joining a gang. It is available at www.nationalgangcenter.gov/video.