

Volunteers, items needed for annual homeless count

By NANCY MCCLEARY NMCCLEARY@SANFORDHERALD.COM Jan 13, 2022

Each year, members of the S-3 Housing Connect conduct a count of the homeless in Lee County and Sanford and, at the same, provide them with needed items.

The Point in Time count will be done Jan. 26 and Cindy Hall, coordinator of the local effort, is asking for clothing, toiletries, food and volunteers.

“One week of the year, we have a homeless count here,” Hall said. “It has to include those in shelters, The Haven and ... the Navigation Center.”

The count also includes those who are without any shelter and are living in woods, on streets, under bridges and anywhere else that might prove safe, Hall said.

Volunteers and members of S3 form groups that go to each site where the homeless are known to stay.

“We go to locations. Sometimes we find people, sometimes we don’t,” Hall said.

Finding the unsheltered is challenging, she said, but through the years, the team has created a map “identifying most of the places we know where people sleep.”

Counting isn’t all the volunteers do, Hall said. They also provide each person with a bag containing essential items such as food, clothing, toiletries and blankets as well as a list of resources that are available for them.

“We want to make sure they have those resources,” Hall said.

The goal is to complete 150 bags that can be given to the homeless.

Items to put in the bag are needed and Hall is asking for specific items to go in the bags.

That includes hats and gloves; canned goods that can be eaten hot or cold and have pop-tops; granola bars and other snacks; hygiene items including deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hand lotion and small bottles of shampoo.

Other items that are needed include small, rolled fleece blankets; hand warmers; small flashlights and gently used winter coats.

Items can be dropped off at The Sanford Herald, the Buggy Factory or First Baptist Church.

A brief training session for volunteers will be held the same night as the count, starting at 6 p.m. in First Baptist Church’s Fellowship Hall, before venturing out with a team.

Last year, Hall said, about 25 people helped with the count.

“It’s quick work,” she said. “We take 3x5 cards and write the location (visited). You don’t go where you don’t feel safe and never encroach on their territory. It’s their home.”

Last year's numbers were skewed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hall said, but in the 2020 count, about 100 unsheltered people were counted with another 50 to 100 who were staying in shelters.

"We thought there was going to be a huge increase with all the evictions, but it hasn't happened. I don't know if it will happen later on," Hall said.

This year, PIT teams are to follow up with homeless individuals so efforts can be made to get them to a safer location, Hall said.

For more information or to volunteer, call Hall at 919-935-9028 or send an email to Cindy.oma.hall@gmail.com.