• Special to the Daily Leader

As part of a statewide project to count the homeless on Jan. 28, the Seward County United Way and the Stepping Stone Shelter will be recruiting, training, and coordinating the local volunteers to conduct a point-in-time count of homeless.

The Kansas Housing Resources Corporation selected United Way of the Plains to coordinate “Everybody Counts,” a statewide count of homeless individuals in 40 targeted counties on Jan. 28. The selection was based on the recommendation of the Kansas Point-In-Time Partners, a group of community stakeholders and state organizations.

Volunteers in 40 counties of Kansas will go to shelters and targeted urban and suburban locations to survey homeless individuals. The goal is to count all homeless individuals who are staying in shelters or staying in cars, abandoned buildings, under bridges, etc. The process includes a survey to determine how long the persons have been homeless, what conditions led them to be homeless and other important information to help address homelessness.

“As President of United Ways of Kansas, I thought it was important that any United Way that was in a targeted county assist in this process and we made that commitment at our October 2008 meeting,”

said Kay Burtzloff, executive director of the Seward County United Way. Burtzloff said that she attended the volunteer training provided by the United Way of the Plains, along with Pat Allsbury, director of the Stepping Stone Shelter, and Barbara Correll, housing/supported employment coordinator with Southwest Guidance Center.

“We are now looking for volunteers to assist us in the process. We will need a minimum of 20 volunteers in our teams that will scour the city and the county, plus volunteers to help us staff

our headquarters from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Jan. 28," Burtzloff said.

Volunteers on the survey teams will be asked to commit to a six-hour time period, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. or 2 to 8 p.m. Support volunteers can be utilized in shorter time periods.

All volunteers must register through a web-based survey, said Burtzloff, and survey team volunteers also must go through a two-hour training which will include a free meal. "We can't pay our volunteers but we can provide them with mileage if they are asked to be one of the team driving the county and we are planning to provide refreshments." Burtzloff is planning to schedule at least two trainings, one over the lunch hour and one at night.

Burtzloff said that each team will be provided with a cell phone to call in reports and for any questions or concerns they might have.

"EPIC PCS has already committed to providing us with the cell phones, which we deeply appreciate," she said.

"In the past, we've counted the homeless by just seeing who was in shelter at Stepping Stone Shelter and the Liberal Area Rape Crisis and Domestic Violence Services shelter. This is the first year, however, that we will walk the streets and drive the county roads to find those homeless not in shelter. It will give both the county and the state a truer picture of the homeless situation that we have,"

Burtzloff said.

To volunteer or find out more information, contact Burtzloff at 624-5400 or email scunitedway@sbcglobal.net
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United Way of the Plains has established a standardized survey form, and is assisting in

recruiting volunteers, providing training to local county leaders and coordinating the counting process. The sponsors of “Everybody Counts” Kansas Homeless Count are: Kansas Housing Resources Corporation and Kansas SRS Disability & Behavioral Health Services.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a “Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons” across the country.

Communities need accurate data on homelessness to determine the size and scope of the homeless problem at the local level, plan services and programs appropriately to address local needs, measure progress in addressing homelessness, and measure performance of individual programs and the system as a whole. HUD needs data to understand the extent and nature of homelessness throughout the country, to make funding decisions and more.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the survey link that volunteers need to fill out:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=EpJimh33NyM_2fcvxUV75SZA_3d_3d