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STEPS FORWARD**

Ending Homelessness. Starting Fresh.

## Press Release

### **For Immediate Release**

January 10, 2022

Contact: Pat Macht

(916)204-6618/[pmacht@sacstepsforward.org](mailto:pmacht@sacstepsforward.org)

## **SSF Postpones Unsheltered Resident Census Until February; Seeks Volunteers to Assist with Count Now Scheduled for Evenings of February 23 and 24**

### **500 Volunteers Needed to Count the Unsheltered**

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** -- Sacramento Steps Forward today issued a call for an estimated 500 volunteers to help do a physical count of individuals living outdoors throughout Sacramento County on Feb. 23 and 24.

The count, previously set for January 26 and 27, was rescheduled based on a review of the public health order issued Thursday by Sacramento County's Health Officer related to the rapid spread of the COVID 19 omicron variant as well as federal guidance on the "Point in Time" census of unsheltered residents.

SSF, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit serving the Sacramento region, is the lead agency for the Sacramento Continuum of Care (CoC), the regional planning body that coordinates housing and services for homeless families and individuals in the Sacramento area. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires all CoCs to conduct the count at a specified time every other year in order to qualify for federal funding for homeless services programs.

"While every other January is when we are required to do this, COVID has gotten in the way. But like other organizations, we must approach our work with public health safety first. That is why we are going to move up the date by a month," said Lisa Bates, SSF Executive Director. "This year's count is more important than ever, because it will give us hard data on the state of homelessness, particularly how the effects of the pandemic over the last two years have affected the rate of homelessness." Its benefits will affect how future strategies to end homelessness will be shaped.

“The critical data this count will give our community is indispensable in assessing progress in decreasing homelessness, identifying strengths and gaps in our assistance programs, all of which forms the basis for future programs and services,” she added.

The scheduled count for 2020 was cancelled due to COVID. The last count was done in 2019. Using a largely volunteer workforce, it identified 5,570 persons experiencing homelessness on a given night, an increase of 19 percent countywide over the previous two-year period.

The PIT count identifies the number of unhoused individuals, families, or unaccompanied youth under age 18; the length of time being homeless; age; marital status; ethnicity and establishes the number of those who are veterans or disabled. Unsheltered residents will also be asked about their health, wellbeing, and vaccination status.

Volunteers will have more choices about where they can help. New in 2022 is the addition of more PIT deployment centers throughout the region. The central deployment center will be located on the CSU Sacramento main campus. Satellite deployment sites will also be located in the cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, and Rancho Cordova.

Extensive preparation for the event includes the pre-mapping of locations where there is a reasonable probability of people living outside, important to ensuring that volunteer canvassers’ time is put to efficient use.

Bates said a volunteer sign up portal is now available on the SSF website. “Past volunteers tell us it is a great way to learn about homelessness and make an impact. Some do it to earn volunteer hours or course credit, have a joint activity with friends or colleagues, or simply to accomplish something unique and meaningful. Whatever their reason, we welcome their participation and involvement,” she said.

There are two ways volunteers can help. “We will be putting together small teams of canvassers who will use a survey tool we developed, record the count and distribute gift cards to survey participants. And there are a variety of essential support functions that a volunteer can sign up for, as well,” she said.

These include such support functions as being a volunteers’ concierge who distributes packets to canvassers and addresses canvassing questions; serving as check- in and check- out station attendants, health screeners, or helping distribute food and beverages to volunteers.

To be a canvasser, volunteers must be at least 18 years of age, be willing to travel by foot or car, attend all required trainings and be willing to bring their own flashlight, smartphone or other personal supplies.

“We are making every effort to ensure our volunteers will have a well- organized, supported and safe experience,” Bates said.

All volunteers must show proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by having at least 2 shots of Pfizer or Moderna, or 1 shot of Johnson and Johnson vaccine, and of course, anyone with active symptoms of a cold, flu or COVID-19 will not be able to participate.

For more information, visit [www.sacstepsforward.org](http://www.sacstepsforward.org)

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