

Homeless count to include those not in shelters

By Kathryn Reed

Counting the number of people in shelters has been going on for years. This is the first year communities are required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to count the homeless who are not in a shelter.

This means people living on the street or in their cars or some other substandard setting.

The count will occur Jan. 30 throughout the United States.

Cheyenne Lane with Tahoe Youth & Family Services is leading the charge on the South Shore.

Questions people will be asked include, but are not limited to:

- Where will you sleep tonight?
- Have you been homeless more than four times in the last three years?
- Why are you homeless?
- Have you been in the military?
- What is your income?
- Do you have children?
- What services could have prevented you from becoming homeless?

Volunteers will be looking for homeless people behind Safeway, Raley's at the Y, Harrah's near Van Sickle Bi-State Park,

Meek's, Kmart, at the old Ace Hardware, South Lake Tahoe Library, churches, campgrounds, underpasses, transit centers and on buses.

There is no homeless shelter in the Lake Tahoe Basin. People on the South Shore are still trying to open a warming room in South Lake Tahoe. A shelter usually is permanent and has an array of services, while a warming room is more temporary – opening when overnight temps get to a certain level. They may not even have cots.

A meeting about the warming room this week proved advocates are still uncertain exactly what type of facility the area needs or what they are capable of providing.

A commitment from the Salvation Army, Del Oro Division still needs to be put in writing. From there the local advocates will know what type of funding may be forthcoming.

Research unearthed that many homeless who have vehicles spend the night at the KOA campground in South Lake Tahoe. It has rest rooms and laundry facilities, and heaters can be placed in vehicles for warmth through the night. A commercial real estate agent has been contacted about possible properties that could be turned into a warming room. Temporary trailered showers like those used at Burning Man are a possibility.

Finding out what the local homeless population wants is another desire. Not everyone wants off the street. And some won't leave their belongs – be it in a vehicle or shopping cart.