**CHW Safety Plan for Nobles County**

**Before Going on a Home Visit: Office Procedures**

**In the Office**

* Review Nobles County Safety material and policies.
* Review Panic Button information (attached).
* Show your supervisor where the panic buttons are in your work area and how to access them.
* Program 911 into speed dial on your phone and cell phone.

**Scheduling, Equipment and Knowing Where You Are**

* Tell your supervisor where you are going and when you expect to return.
* Set a time at which you will call your supervisor between home visits.
* Make sure that the address and phone contact in Nightingale Notes is up to date and accurate.
* Put client initials and address and phone number on your calendar for each home visit.
* If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask a staff member who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or possible hazards.
* Ask for precise driving instructions and consult a map before leaving the office. Know that GPS is not always the best way to navigate. Get to know the community.
* If you have cause for concern about the client or the location, take a CHW buddy with you.
* Always use a cell phone. Be sure your cell phone is charged and working.
* Pay attention to the weather and how it may impact your day. In winter carry a winter weather emergency kit in your car.
* Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits early in the day. You’ll be less likely to find loitering and illegal activities.
* Arrange your work schedule so home visits occur only during daylight hours.

**Pre-Visit Call**

* Contact the client ahead of the visit to confirm so he/she will be watching for your arrival.
* Ask the client if he/she has a pet. Ask to have the pet put in a separate room for the visit.
* Inform the client that you cannot do a home visit with a firearm present. If the client has firearms they must be stored safely for the visit.

# In The Car

* Keep your car in good working order and make sure you have enough gas to carry you through the day.
* Before entering your car, check the back seat. When approaching, be sure to look under the car.
* Lock your car doors and keep windows up at all times. If necessary, keep windows only partially open above ear level while driving.
* Keep valuables out of sight. (Or don’t carry them during home visits.)
* Avoid rubble and broken glass that can flatten a tire and immobilize your car.
* If possible, try to park where you can see your car from inside the home.
* Choose a parking space that is well lit, or that offers the safest walking route to the dwelling.
* Do not park in a driveway to lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave.
* Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home.
* Be wary of dead end streets.

# In The Community

* Work with a partner, if possible.
* Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment.
* Walk confidently and purposefully.
* Wear shoes and clothing that make it easy to move quickly.
* Avoid carrying a purse while in the field.
* Carry a minimal amount of money, your driver’s license, and your keys on your person, not in a purse.
* Lock your purse in the trunk of your car before leaving the office if you must have it with you.
* Make yourself known to businesses and institutions and also to management and security personnel in public housing and other high-rise buildings.
* Look for public places and public telephones. You don’t need any money to call 911.
* Call the office at scheduled times to check in.

# Approaching the Dwelling

* Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave.
* Drive around the area of the dwelling looking for:
  + Unsafe conditions like poor lighting, limited visibility (fences, bushes), unsecured animals, people yelling, drinking, fighting, and loitering.
  + Sources of help like pay phones, neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers such as police and fire personnel, utility trucks.
* If you find you have an incorrect address, don’t search for the client by knocking on strange doors. Call your office.
* If you suspect you are being followed, enter the closest public place. If a car is following you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.
* If people are loitering on the street or sidewalk, walk around them or cross the street.
* If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and don’t attempt to answer verbal challenges.

**Using an Elevator**

* If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible.
* Always stand next to the door and the control panel.
* If you have a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all the floors, providing a better chance of escape.
* Press the appropriate floor number yourself. Don’t ask someone else to do it.
* If someone suspicious gets on while you’re already in the elevator, get off as soon as possible.

**At The Dwelling**

* Pay attention to signs like “No Trespassing” , “Beware of the Dog”, etc., as they may be an indicator of the residents’ attitudes toward strangers.
* Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud quarreling or fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately.
* If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the client is home before entering.
* Do not enter a home when you suspect an unsafe condition exists.
* If you decide it’s safe to enter, don’t let your guard down. Be alert to signs of violence or sexual advances from either the client or family members.
* Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the dwelling and where the telephone is located.
* If there are people present that you feel are a danger, reschedule the visit.
* Be aware of traffic in and out of the home while you are there.
* If there are pets in the home, note this on your record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the client to put it in another room for the duration of the visit.
* Do not go into a dark room, basement, or attic first. Have the client go first and turn on the light. Follow; never lead, even if you’ve been to the dwelling before.
* While it is legal to have a firearm in the home, its casual display is inappropriate. If you see a firearm, or become aware of one in the room, or see someone is armed, leave immediately or as soon as possible within the range of your professional responsibilities. Notify your supervisor and assess the risk level. Minimally, require the client to put the firearm in another room during your rescheduled visit and tell them to not allow armed individuals in the residence during your visit(s).
* If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you reenter.
* If you feel unsafe because of a heated family argument that erupts, leave as soon as possible.
* When sitting, choose a hard chair, if possible, so you are able to get up more quickly.
* If possible, sit so your back is to a solid wall, not to an unknown space.
* Sit as close to an entrance/exit as possible.

# Dealing With Hostile/Angry Clients

* Clients can react with anger because of difficulty in finding help with their situations, emotional pain or discomfort, or fear and anxiety about the results of your visit.
* React and respond to the client in a calm but firm manner.
* To help the client define their anger, verbally acknowledge it. “I understand that you are upset” or “It sounds like you’re really angry about this.”
* Reinforce the positive long-term benefits of your assistance, your commitment to their best interests, and your role as their ally.
* A lower volume of voice can help the client calm down.
* Encourage the client to sit down.
* Rehearse ahead of time what you’d say or do in these situations.
* If situation appears dangerous, leave and call 911.

**Always**

* Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave.
* Call the office at scheduled times to check in.
* Tell your supervisor about anything unusual that occurs.
* Ask your supervisor when you have a question- don’t make assumptions.