

What Can I Do?

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What Cache County Leaders and Residents Can Do to Strengthen the Impact of Girls and Women in Their Area

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Cache County, Utah, is full of engaged, passionate individuals who frequently ask the question, “What can I do to strengthen the impact of girls and women in this area?” To provide specific answers to that question, the **Utah Women & Leadership Project** (UWLP) and Utah State University (USU) Extension hosted a “think tank” gathering to collect ideas for individuals, groups, and organizations interested in supporting and empowering girls and women in their area.

This idea sheet is based on a 2022 gathering of 33 leaders and residents in Cache County, Utah. Girls and women face challenges unique to the area in which they live, and the goal of this gathering was to identify those barriers and determine strategies and initiatives that local leaders and residents can implement to address them. This document includes recommendations in the following areas: education, health and wellbeing, business and economics, culture and religion, and community engagement.

EDUCATION

Ensuring that women complete high school and obtain college certificates and degrees is critically important to Cache County leaders and residents. Efforts in schools, colleges, and communities to support these efforts need to be strengthened. Because of cultural barriers, many young women do not finish their college education and face significant hurdles to return (e.g., funding, lack of childcare, societal expectations). Recommendations include:

- Help girls and young women clearly understand the benefits of completing college certificates and degrees.
- Create mentorship and internship programs that provide opportunities for girls and women to discuss options and opportunities, while also shifting community culture and building bridges.
- Inform girls of all ages about the variety of options they have for college majors, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Through education and activities, ignite an interest in and empower them to pursue degrees and careers they may not have considered.

- Utilize any opportunity to share these messages and options, including one-on-one discussions, high school days, education conferences, and career conventions.
- Support postsecondary education at all levels. In addition to the importance of comprehensive educational opportunities available at Utah State University, skill development through skill-based programs is also important so that women can learn, do, and then teach. For example, Bridgerland Technical College focuses on creating a strong pathway to jobs.
- Remove barriers for women to attend institutions of higher education by accepting partial and continuing education credits and awarding credit for work experience. Creating easier-to-finish degree programs would reduce the cost of completing their education.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

There is significant concern regarding the mental health of girls and women in Cache County who experience challenges such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Additionally, women are socialized to prioritize others before themselves, which often leads to them ignoring their own physical health, safety, and overall wellbeing. Participants were concerned about the wellbeing of girls and women who question their gender and identify as LGBTQ+. Domestic violence is also a significant concern as women continue to stay in harmful situations for a variety of reasons, including the lack of financial options and employable skills. Reasons for these challenges were discussed, including how the predominant religious culture may impact wellbeing if any gender bias, sexism, and discrimination.

Recommendations include:

- Inform youth of existing mental health resources and emphasize that it is okay to use them.
- Increase suicide awareness by teaching that failure is okay and to focus on what is learned in the process. Continue researching the factors in Utah that contribute to suicide risk for girls.
- Implement domestic abuse education programs in elementary school maturation classes to teach girls the signs of abuse, increase support by involving parents, and support girls without parental support.
- Improve messaging around mental health (specifically, break the "just get over it" attitude), increase education about anxiety and depression, teach coping and resilience skills, and normalize mental healthcare.
- Normalize and prioritize mammograms, pap smears, and skin care checks.
- Provide incentives to hire more female physicians in the valley, particularly OBGYNs, as well as personal trainers for older women.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

A shortage of childcare options and a lack of affordable housing and workplace flexibility emerged as top priorities and concerns for women, particularly as they negatively affect women balancing multiple competing responsibilities such as finances, work, and family. This is a particular challenge for female entrepreneurs as they add the complexities of starting a business or nonprofit to their regular workload. Recommendations include:

- Increase awareness of networking opportunities for women in business and nonprofits, as well as in industries and positions where women excel but rarely apply (e.g., developers, data analytics, and business analysis).
- Encourage organizations to create flexible work environments by providing financial support for education and skill training, affordable and high-quality childcare, and more work-from-home jobs.
- Recommend that company leadership conduct regular reviews of all internal policies and procedures with an eye toward equity in systems, structures, and salary.
- Explore all options to increase affordable housing, including tiny houses, leveraging existing housing through zoning, and increasing multifamily units and accessory dwellings.

CULTURE & RELIGION

The "think tank" attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in Cache County is heavily influenced by religion, which often makes it difficult to separate the two. While this can be considered a challenge, it can also make change easier and longer-lasting because one area reinforces the other. Further, there are ethnic subcultures within Cache Valley that directly impact girls and women, including Hispanic traditions and Somali refugee groups,

among others. Finally, from a broader perspective, the pervasive influence of social media on girls and women cannot be overstated. Recommendations include:

- Counter social media by increasing positive messaging to develop body positivity, confidence, unity, and an outward mindset, as well as to have them serve others and think more about the larger world stage.
- Emphasize that girls and women can and should be leaders in all areas of their lives and that their perspectives and voices are essential.
- Strengthen girls and women within their faith-based communities through mentors and role models.
- Choose language that decreases gender stereotypes, expands choice, and increases diversity and acceptance.
- Identify and empower male allies who will advocate for girls and women in multiple spheres.
- Collect and focus on data to identify cultural defaults and deficits and offer ways to improve.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Cache Valley is seeing an increase in women's civic engagement in local government and within their communities. As their influence expands, there is increased desire to share positive messages and material with girls and women so that they know and can easily access available resources. Recommendations include:

- Educate and engage girls in politics and civic duty; host a career day focusing on public service.
- Identify potential women leaders and encourage them to run for office.
- Share historical and contemporary stories of girls and women who experience challenges, failures, and successes to increase confidence, collaboration, and healthy competition.
- Create an outreach group to present information and resources in a variety of places, including K-12 schools (e.g., teacher/counselor training, school assemblies), churches, colleges and universities, and community clubs and groups.
- Centralize resources to provide information and opportunities for all areas addressed in this idea sheet. Develop an app or toolkit to share this information and coordinate a media campaign to disseminate this tool.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Cache County, we will be better able to change harmful or ineffective policies and programs, sustain current effective actions and leaders, identify and solve local problems, and create responsive initiatives. The UWLP encourages leaders and residents to use this document as needed to affect change.

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