

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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What San Juan County Leaders and Residents Can Do To Strengthen the Impact of Girls and Women in Their Area

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

San Juan County 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 USU Blanding 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 2023 gathering of 24 leaders in San Juan County. 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, home and family, health and wellbeing, business and economics, and culture and community engagement.

EDUCATION

Leaders in San Juan County emphasized the essential role schools play in developing leadership, confidence, and competence in girls and young women. They recognize the essential role graduating from college plays in a woman’s life. Recommendations include:

- Address issues that negatively impact development of Native American girls and young women including transportation barriers, cultural stigma, language differences, world views, and jurisdictional barriers.
- Collect data from K-12 and higher education institutions to measure development of all girls and young women; use the data to build appropriate evaluation strategies and to create recommendations and resources.
- Develop and implement mentorship programs within the San Juan School District.
- Encourage girls and young women to fill leadership roles in school (e.g., leadership councils, ambassadors, student government) and support them in that work by training them, developing their skills, and ensuring their voices are heard.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of bullying prevention initiatives throughout San Juan School District.
- Focus on the needs of families in or around the Four-Corners region with children who move from school-to-school.
- Gather, analyze, and share relevant and reflective data regarding Native American girls and young women on tribal and nontribal lands.

- Host women recognition events and conferences with the Utah System of Higher Education.
- Increase opportunities for Native American girls and young women to participate in empowering and enriching extracurricular activities.
- Remove the stigma of mental health therapy from all schools (K-12 through college).
- Support girls’ sports to the same level as boys’ sports. Reevaluate why school spirit week is focused on a boy’s sport (football) and whether it can include a girl’s sport as well.
- Translate screening and risk assessment questions in relevant languages.

HOME & FAMILY

In San Juan County, parents are recognized as the most powerful influences on the lives of their daughters. Recommendations include:

- Address and support nontraditional family structures and dynamics (e.g., grandparents are primary caregivers, single parents, foster homes); consider Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs when creating programs for families.
- Discuss sensitive issues with children and create an open dialogue about what is true; don’t be afraid to teach children about hard topics (e.g., gender issues, consent).
- Emphasize the importance of fathers supporting their daughters.
- Increase awareness of and participation in school activities.
- Provide more resources for single parents.
- Reassure girls that they have a voice and encourage them to speak up and advocate for themselves.
- Replace the traditional, dominant, scarcity mindset (e.g., male vs female, us vs them, gender roles) with one of abundance (e.g., when we lift one group, we lift everyone); be careful not to project learned behaviors onto children and youth.

- Show boys that it is not a woman's job to do household chores, but that unpaid labor and care work can and should be shared between men and women.
- Stop telling girls to "be nice."
- Support community-driven after-school activities and events.
- Teach children about boundaries and that boundaries are okay (e.g., pulling a girl's bra strap at school is not okay and girls should speak up and set that boundary that boys should respect).
- Increase available contracting services to tribal homeowners to facilitate homebuilding.
- Mentor women on how to engage professionally in the workplace, how to re-enter the workforce, and how to communicate their accomplishments, skills, and abilities outside of the workplace in a professional manner that demonstrates transferable skills.
- Reduce poverty and mitigate its effects; ensure women know about available resources and can access them.
- Revisit policies, procedures, and resources to create family-friendly and flexible work environments.
- Train business leaders on how to professionally validate and acknowledge the feelings of women.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Concern over the mental health and emotional wellbeing of girls and women in San Juan County emerged as a primary theme.

Recommendations include:

- Accept help (e.g., financial, physical, mental) and provide help as you can.
- Be willing to engage in difficult conversations around gender.
- Create community groups to support one another in education about social issues (e.g., gender, transgender, women's rights), and to support one another in standing up for their beliefs and to build everyone up.
- Eliminate bullying by teaching children and adults how to set and enforce boundaries.
- Embrace each phase of life and support one another through difficult transitions.
- Encourage women to advocate for themselves and help them find peace with their efforts.
- Increase substance abuse treatment programs for both in- and out-patient needs.
- Normalize therapy.
- Promote awareness of mental health education and behavioral and resources for children.
- Stop judging one another, comparisons, and feelings of guilt for being different; encourage, strengthen, and support each other.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, San Juan County women struggle with limited opportunities for internal advancement and leadership, as well as with conscious and unconscious bias. Recommendations include:

- Eliminate economic barriers to women's ability to provide for their families by increasing affordable housing, improving transportation options, adding bus routes, repairing weather-related erosion on country roads, and fixing sidewalks.
- Ensure the business community is open to women in all professions; eliminate the idea that there are specific jobs for men and separate jobs for women.
- Help female entrepreneurs start and grow businesses by reaching out to vocational rehab facilities, small business centers, and the Small Business, Professional Development, Application, Resources, and Certification (SPARC) building at USU Blanding.
- Improve childcare to ensure parents have access to affordable, accessible, and safe options. Provide childcare grants to defray costs for those who need financial help. Increase flexibility in workplaces for on-site childcare.

CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The "think tank" attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in San Juan County is heavily influenced by religion. Leaders are concerned about the limitations and decreased value culture has placed on women and girls. Recommendations include:

- Acknowledge and address cultural limitations and mindsets from race, ethnicity, religious, and biological perspectives; pay particular attention to the Native American culture in San Juan County.
- Collaborate with tribal nations to empower native girls.
- Develop a "You Belong" campaign to promote inclusion.
- Encourage women to run for office with the support and mentorship of male allies.
- Improve community facilities to host courses, trainings, and events to support girls and women including sexual assault and self-defense classes, sex-ed/consent parental discussion groups, post-pandemic challenge groups, summer enrichment programs, and recreational opportunities and activities.
- Incentivize women to step up and participate in solving community problems.
- Increase grants and funding for female-oriented community-driven organizations, activities, and events.
- Invite national nonprofit and evidence-based organizations, like Big Brothers Big Sisters, to open chapters in San Juan County.
- Legitimize issues and discrepancies affecting women by working with local and state politicians and government leaders.
- Partner with local educational institutions to create mentorship programs for girls and women.
- Recognize local female leaders and women making a difference through community women's recognition events and conferences and inviting women to speak and mentor in schools, churches, and community groups. Promote county/city proclamations that support women and designate a weekday as "Women's Day Off".

CONCLUSION

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