

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



NO. 21 | JUNE 1, 2022

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

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Summit 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 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 35 leaders in Summit 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: youth and sports, education, health and wellbeing, business and economics, culture and religion, and community engagement.

YOUTH & SPORTS

Due to the Olympic athletic facilities and abundant outdoor opportunities in Summit County, sports was a key topic of discussion at the think tank, particularly as it relates to role models and opportunities for girls and young women. This focus on youth was present in all discussion groups, as it is understood that social change often comes as young people grow and mature into adults. Recommendations include:

- Establish a county youth center where diverse youth can come together to learn life skills, connect with local organizations, receive mentoring from each other and caring/qualified adults, and share experiences.
- Convene a county youth council composed of teens from a variety of organizations (e.g., churches, clubs, schools, nonprofits) to allow young women an opportunity to speak out and lead.
- Emphasize the importance of all types of physical activity when girls are young (e.g., rodeos, farming, sports).
- Expose girls and young women to the many different winter and summer sports available in Summit County; highlight the Olympic experience and how Utah women participate and excel.

- Prioritize women's sports to the same degree as men's sports (e.g., funding, pay, facilities, publicity).

EDUCATION

Leaders in Summit County emphasized the essential role schools play in developing leadership, confidence, and competence in girls and young women through curriculum and opportunities. Ensuring that women complete high school and obtain college certificates and degrees is critically important to continue a woman's development. Recommendations include:

- Teach leadership skills to girls in all K-12 schools.
- Emphasize financial literacy education for girls.
- Ensure sex education is taught from a positive point of view.
- Provide paid internships for high school students.
- Urge girls to run for student government positions to prepare them for civic leadership as adults.
- Inform girls about the various options they have for college majors and careers, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).
- Recognize and address gender bias at school, use inclusive language, and promote opportunities for all students.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of education for Latina students and make any needed changes; emphasize the value of being bilingual and support first-generation students.
- Encourage school boards to partner with local nonprofits to educate girls on community opportunities; distribute appropriate resources from community organizations to girls.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Concern over the mental health and emotional wellbeing of girls and women in Summit County emerged as a primary theme. Negative self-esteem, poor body image, and low confidence levels are prevalent among girls and women. Participants worried about the effects of sexual assault, harassment, and domestic violence. Recommendations include:

- Empower girls and women to speak up and advocate for themselves.
- Eliminate the pressure to be perfect by encouraging girls and women to take risks, stop defining themselves by their physical appearance, and reframe failure as an integral component in the growth process.
- Lower barriers to mental health resources and support, with special attention to obstacles experienced by girls and women of color.
- Normalize consent by teaching how to set and enforce boundaries.
- Believe girls and women when abuse is reported, help them take appropriate action, and support them through the process.
- Increase awareness and education of prevention work and participate in changing legislation regarding consent.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, Summit County women struggle with a lack of affordable and available childcare, limited opportunities for internal advancement and leadership, and bias (conscious and unconscious). Recommendations include:

- Host a career fair with a focus on women in leadership from different sectors.
- Provide training and mentoring to help women connect with each other, local businesses, and nonprofits; build their confidence by learning new skills; seek work in professions where women are under-represented; and coach current and potential entrepreneurs.
- Encourage businesses to build and support women's networks; initiate or expand diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) divisions; provide affordable and accessible care for children and elderly parents; and create opportunities for women of different cultures and backgrounds to grow and lead at work.
- Increase the number of women on boards and commissions and in leadership positions.
- Identify and empower male allies who will advocate for girls and women in multiple spheres.

CULTURE & RELIGION

The think tank attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in Summit County is heavily influenced by religion, which often makes it difficult to separate the two. There is also a significant local Hispanic subculture affecting the opportunities and success of its girls and women. Recommendations include:

- Encourage self-determination of life choices rather than assuming those assigned by culture, religion, and tradition. Increase self-awareness by learning about individual gifts, talents, and strengths, and incorporate those into the decision-making process.
- Embrace and incorporate Latinx culture in Summit County by increasing Latinx representation in leadership, involving Latinx individuals and organizations in community decisions and initiatives, and providing resources and events in Spanish.
- Reevaluate leadership structures in all organizations to ensure that power and authority are tempered by humanity.
- Increase male awareness of issues affecting girls and women in a non-threatening and non-shaming manner. Consider how male children perceive women in power.
- Shift responsibility for boys' and men's sexual thoughts, feelings, and behavior to themselves instead of blaming it on what girls and women wear and how they act.
- Acknowledge the binary nature of this discussion and consider ways we can address it. Ask who is not at the table and/or missing from each discussion, invite them to participate, and listen to them.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Participants appreciate the strengths of local women and the power and influence inherent in their lived experiences and stories. Maximizing the potential of these women as tremendous local assets to empower and inspire others is critical. Recommendations include:

- Develop mentoring programs, groups, and networks to normalize, teach, and support women as leaders. Provide a stipend as needed so that women can afford to reach out, mentor others, and lead.
- Create a women's resource center to host mentoring programs, provide educational classes and resources on all areas addressed in this document, hold support groups, and learn leadership skills. Provide on-site childcare to facilitate participation.
- Establish a speaking circuit in which women travel throughout the county to share their stories and leadership experiences; do this both in person and remotely by sharing prerecorded videos.
- Initiate an annual Women's Week in Summit County to eliminate barriers, invite action, and coordinate next steps. Include workshops, speakers, and films/videos, and ensure all products are bilingual. Collaborate with local businesses and nonprofits.
- Identify potential female political candidates, encourage them to run for office at all levels, and train and support them through the process.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Summit County, we will more effectively change harmful or unproductive 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.

Utah Women & Leadership Project • www.utwomen.org • uwlp@usu.edu

Thank you to Jared Hawkins of USU Extension, and to the many collaborators and partners in Summit County who supported the community conversation. Report authors: Angie Kleven and Dr. Susan R. Madsen.