

# What Can I Do?

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## What Uintah Basin Leaders and Residents Can Do to Strengthen the Impact of Girls and Women in Their Area

UTAH **WOMEN & LEADERSHIP** Project

The Uintah Basin of eastern 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) Uintah Basin 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 30 leaders in the Uintah Basin. 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 and sports, health and wellbeing, home and family, business and economics, culture and religion, and community engagement.

### EDUCATION & SPORTS

Uintah Basin leaders and residents noted that confident, compassionate, and capable women come from educated, principled, and experienced girls. The messages and opportunities girls and boys receive in school directly inform and impact their growth and success as adults, as well as how they see and treat each other. Ensuring that women complete high school and obtain college certificates and degrees is critically important to continue a woman’s development. Recommendations include:

- Inform girls and women of all resources available to them to facilitate and continue their education.
- Introduce girls and women to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses and careers, and emphasize their benefits (e.g., higher pay and workplace flexibility).
- Ensure girls and women have access to all available courses, certification/degree programs, and career options, especially those in nontraditional areas (e.g., automotive mechanics, welding, electrical).
- Evaluate school programs, initiatives, and curriculum by asking whether outcomes and objectives are being accomplished and what can be improved regarding girls and women.

- Provide equal opportunities for girls to participate fully in athletics.
- Increase promotion, recognition, and visibility of girls and women in sports to ensure that all genders will benefit from visible female athletic role models.

### HEALTH & WELLBEING

Specific mental and physical health challenges for girls and women in the Uintah Basin include a fixed mindset, opioid dependence, and domestic violence. Many women struggle with issues (e.g., body image, perfectionism, imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and taking risks) that decrease confidence and foster depression and anxiety. The opioid epidemic, particularly rampant in the Uintah Basin, causes significant physical and mental problems for all genders. Although there are community efforts to address domestic violence, it continues to be a primary local concern, exacerbated by the pandemic. Recommendations include:

- Teach girls the importance of speaking up for themselves.
- Help girls and women build social networks that will support and lift them.
- Disseminate positive messaging to teach girls and women to broaden their perspectives and foster growth mindsets instead of focusing on their own physical attributes and weaknesses.
- Increase awareness of accessible and affordable mental health resources; where there are deficits, provide additional outreach and resources.
- Partner with organizations working to reduce opioid harm (e.g., USU Extension’s HEART Initiative).
- Address the impact of pornography addiction and provide awareness of support groups for users and family members.

## HOME & FAMILY

Traditional gender roles at home emerged as a primary theme in the Uintah Basin with the understanding that equality and partnership start early, and children are taught by example what they can and should expect out of themselves, each other, and life in general. Marrying young, before brain development is complete, perpetuates attitudes and actions that become enmeshed with identity, further complicating differentiation of self from spouse and family. Recommendations include:

- Inspire girls to dream big; they need to understand they can have many roles in addition to being wives and mothers.
- Reevaluate gender roles for women and men and adjust responsibilities to distribute unpaid work responsibilities more evenly.
- Encourage women to let go of unrealistic and perfectionist expectations with their home and family relationships and seek life balance by pursuing hobbies, education, and paid work (part- or full-time).
- Teach boys how to be supportive husbands and involved fathers.
- Recognize and value men's contributions to family by eliminating language (e.g., babysitting, "Mr. Mom") that minimizes their unpaid work at home.

## BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, top priorities include addressing the shortage of childcare options, the lack of viable and variable career choices, male-dominated leadership, and workplace inflexibility. Women struggle with multiple competing responsibilities, a problem compounded by the gender wage gap and gendered advancement opportunities, which create heavy financial, mental, and emotional burdens. Recommendations include:

- Urge organizations to create flexible work environments by providing better maternity leave, more work-from-home jobs, and childcare options that are safe, affordable, and accessible.
- Promote women into leadership positions, recognizing and valuing their experiences and perspectives. Reinforce that women have leadership skills developed in other parts of their lives and that this knowledge and experience transfers into many different settings.
- Expose women to nontraditional and male-dominated careers (e.g., the trades, oil and gas, wildlife resources, technology).
- Encourage women to consider entrepreneurship and connect them with mentoring and financing.

## CULTURE & RELIGION

The "think tank" attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in the Uintah Basin 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 as one area reinforces the other. Further, there are

ethnic subcultures and traditions, including Latinos and Indigenous tribes, that greatly influence experiences for local girls and women. From a broader perspective, the pervasive influence of social media on girls and women cannot be overstated. Recommendations include:

- Shift from a traditional structure toward one of equal partnership between men and women.
- Identify and empower male allies who will advocate for girls and women in multiple spheres.
- Seek out and listen to women's perspectives, insights, and experiences, and give their input equal weight in conversations and decisions.
- Recognize, highlight, and celebrate the successes of girls and women.
- Counter social media by increasing positive messaging to develop body positivity, confidence, unity, and an outward mindset.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In the Uintah Basin, only a few women hold positions of leadership within their communities and local governments; this also includes the Ute Tribal Council. Without women in these roles, policies, laws, and traditions are slow to change as female perspectives, influence, and skills are needed for balance and wholeness. Recommendations include:

- Hold leadership accountable for change, and change leaders as needed.
- Reassure women and men that by abandoning a scarcity/fixed mindset, individuals, families, and entire communities will be lifted.
- Share historical and contemporary stories of girls and women who experience challenges, failures, and successes to increase confidence, collaboration, and healthy competition.
- Create leadership programs that will help women recognize their leadership abilities and how to lead. In addition, teach women how to be engaged, vocal, and effective followers.
- Expose women and men to successful women in government and political leadership.
- Identify potential female candidates, encourage them to run for office, and train/support them through the process.
- Convene more events like this think tank where community leaders and residents can come together, increase trust, and decrease fear.

## CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in the Uintah Basin, 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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