

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



NO. 28 | JUNE 20, 2023

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

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

Emery 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 Extension – Emery County 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 20 leaders in Emery 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 Emery 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:

- Advocate for the educational needs and abilities of girls of all ages.
- Ask legislators to fund educational activities and programs.
- Bring in state and national experts on subjects and topics that impact children and youth to provide awareness, resources, instruction, and tools that will help them and their parents (e.g., social media, suicide).
- Continue performing arts programs in all K-12 schools.
- Develop more after-school activities for children of all ages.
- Empower girls by providing leadership training and opportunities at school.
- Encourage women to take online college courses so that they can graduate from college without leaving Emery County.
- Ensure girls and young women have equal access to educational opportunities.
- Evaluate scores and pedagogical practices to determine how girls see themselves and how well they are and will be supported in their pursuits.
- Expose girls to educational and career fields of all kinds, especially those that are traditionally male (e.g., trades, technology, farm work).
- Fund sports and activities for girls.

- Highlight STEM education and careers for girls and young women beginning in kindergarten and going through college by exposing them to related books, teachers, programs, and role models. Eliminate the stigma that STEM is only for boys and young men, and teach girls that they are intelligent and capable of learning and doing science, technology, engineering, and math.
- Increase funding for STEM programs.
- Instill the values of kindness and respect at the earliest ages.
- Promote the importance and feasibility of getting a graduate degree.
- Provide scholarships and grants to women who start and/or return to college.
- Raise awareness in schools of the importance of inclusion.
- Support the library system and its activities.
- Teach growth mindset in elementary school and continue teaching it through middle and high schools.

HOME & FAMILY

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

- Build confidence in girls by encouraging them to take risks.
- Help parents identify and close the gap between what they think is happening with their children and what their children are actually doing and experiencing.
- Distribute care work and unpaid labor equally between parents so that all children grow up being able to care for their family and understand that family government is a true partnership rather than a division of gender-based responsibilities.
- Encourage women to stay in or return to college so that their daughters will make the same choice.
- Validate the work that women do for their families by acknowledging, naming, and expressing appreciation for it.
- Show girls that they are equal to boys by giving them the same opportunities, eliminating the phrase “just a girl/woman”, and telling them they are strong, smart, and capable.

- Empower mothers by helping them understand that they can integrate a variety of roles in whatever ways they choose (e.g., mother, spouse, student, volunteer, business leader, politician).
- Listen to girls and women.
- Model self-care by addressing mental health needs, pursuing meaningful hobbies and activities, receiving an education, being brave and bold, minimizing overwhelm, saying no, and caring for body and mind through healthcare and rest.
- Find ways for women to be self-sufficient so they and their families can thrive, not just survive or live hand-to-mouth.
- Address the lack of basic resources such as affordable housing and sufficient public transportation so that women can care for themselves and their families.
- Bring trades and other employment opportunities to the county so that men and women, mothers and fathers can provide for their families.
- Close the wage gap by increasing wages for women.
- Eliminate gender-based assumptions about what women are capable of professionally.
- Encourage women to pursue male-dominated jobs and careers (e.g., trades, farm work).
- End poverty, especially for single moms and women over age 70.
- Expose women to a variety of different careers available to them (e.g., tech, trades).
- Increase access to high-quality, affordable, accessible, and available childcare.
- Provide resources, training, and coaching so that women can start and run businesses.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Concern over the mental health and emotional wellbeing of girls and women in Emery County emerged as a primary theme. Recommendations include:

- Address the violence promoted by video games.
- Break the silence and stop keeping secrets about abuse of all kinds.
- Bring healthcare specialists to the county to address health-related problems of all kinds.
- Combat suicidal ideation by sharing information and resources from mental health experts with people in all sectors of society.
- Build confidence in women by helping them recognize opportunities, make decisions, and facilitate their choices.
- Create support groups and networks to bring women together so they are not isolated and can network, find mentors/mentees, and build meaningful relationships.
- Educate the community about consent, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, assault, and the sexualization of girls and women.
- Eliminate phrases such as "suck it up" or "cowboy up" that imply the solution to a problem is to ignore it, disbelieve it, or fear it.
- Ensure girls and women know where and how to turn for help with sexual assault and domestic violence (e.g., housing, money, resources) so that they will seek help rather than stay in abusive situations.
- Increase access to mental health therapists, resources, and options in the county, especially for those without insurance or Medicare/Medicaid.
- Instill hope to people of all ages!
- Negate negative social media influences and messages by sharing messages and images of hope, body positivity, and positive peer pressure.
- Normalize asking for and getting help with mental health challenges.
- Spread information about substance abuse problems (e.g., prescription drugs, street drugs, alcohol), especially where and how to get help.
- Stop labeling each other and making racist or demeaning comments. Accept and respect all races, genders, and socioeconomic states.
- Support those who are LGBTQ+ and their family members with the information and resources they need to know how valued and needed they are, and how to build a positive life, rather than considering suicide.
- Teach mental first aid so people will recognize the signs and symptoms of distress and know how to get help for themselves or others.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

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

CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The "think tank" attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in Emery 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 the cultural limitations and mindset in the county from religion and different generations.
- Centralize resources into one database that can be accessed and/or disseminated throughout the county.
- Change the dominant scarcity mindset (e.g., us vs them, men vs women) to one of abundance (e.g., when you lift one group, you lift everyone).
- Create and fund extracurricular activities and leadership training programs for women.
- Ensure that women have a seat at the table in every setting when important discussions are held and decisions are made; listen to their input and incorporate their feedback.
- Hold events that focus on women, and recognize female leaders within the county.
- Identify, encourage, and mentor women who are willing and able to run for political office.
- Invite girls and women to share the breadth and depth of their skills, particularly those outside of traditional female roles.
- Recognize male allies who support, mentor, and encourage girls and women.
- Support community organizations, events, and activities that empower and develop girls and women (e.g., Girl Scouts, 4-H, faith-based).
- Use social media to share data, resources, and events.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Emery 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.