

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP
Project

Weber 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)**, the YCC Family Crisis Center, and USU Extension – Weber 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 36 leaders in Weber 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 Weber 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:

- Consider incorporating mentoring opportunities into and outside of high school.
- Ensure there is culturally responsible representation (e.g., multicultural, gender) in all educational institutions (K-12 through college).
- Help students make connections through experiential learning and modeling.
- Increase awareness of higher education resources.
- Promote gender equity and opportunity in STEM.
- Provide education (formal and informal) that is accessible and affordable.
- Re-evaluate school requirements for health education.
- Teach real life hard and soft skills (e.g., finances, relationships, confidence, peer groups, conversational).

HOME & FAMILY

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

- Acknowledge that family has a different structure for many and reflect that in our language.

- Connect parents to available resources and support groups.
- Expose children at an early age to all toy, clothing, and activity options rather than ones that are limited by gender.
- Focus on all issues related to caregiving, especially those related to women and their families (e.g., childcare, elder care, self-care, mental healthcare).
- Instill confidence in girls and young women by normalizing empowerment, showing them how and where they can contribute, and focusing on the role of the family in this process.
- Normalize talking to children about sex education at an earlier age and define appropriate ages for related discussions.
- Participate in schools to support educators.
- Provide mental healthcare for family members as needed.
- Reinforce and teach children and youth about life milestones required to succeed including obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, and/or career/trade training; establishing a career; and creating a healthy marriage before having babies.
- Support businesses and nonprofit organizations that provide parenting classes, resources, and mentoring that help parents tackle hard conversations and challenging issues.
- Teach children and youth about the importance of allyship and diversity.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

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

- Create mental health outreach programs for schools.
- Educate boys and men on sex education and maternal health.
- Encourage active participation in mental and physical health by breaking cycles of abuse, tearing down stigmas, and increasing confidence.
- Ensure girls and women feel welcome in mental health and support spaces so they will seek out and access resources.

- Fight ignorance and fear by teaching women how to choose a priority and maintain focus.
- Provide culturally responsive care by accepting certifications from other states and countries, focusing on challenges experienced by New Americans, keeping the cost low, ensuring services are equitable, educating on cultural differences, and bringing in more therapists of color who can relate to a client's lived experiences and understand the nuances in systemic racism and related microaggressions.
- Reconsider messaging to young women who struggle to accept failure and feel they have to meet social expectations to excel in all that they do.
- Review the Social Ecological Model of Health by the Centers for Disease Control.
- Share maternal healthcare resources with expectant mothers so they can identify mental and physical concerns and understand where and how to access resources.
- Teach appropriate coping skills for girls and women of all ages.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

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

- Acknowledge that childcare is an economic problem and must be addressed as such.
- Address intergenerational poverty.
- Apply micro assets to a macro environment.
- Ask men to "try again" when they make a sexist comment.
- Be transparent with salaries and salary ranges.
- Celebrate current DEI changes and contributions while encouraging further development.
- Check company culture and diversity for what is expected/desired versus what is.
- Create statewide childcare policies and legislation that incentivize providing accessible, affordable, and flexible childcare options along with paid family leave and supportive infrastructure.
- Encourage women to apply for jobs for which they might be qualified; help them see that their skills, abilities, and leadership roles outside of the workforce have prepared them to work within it.
- Hold a male allyship training forum to teach creating family-friendly policies and how to interact with and uplift women in the workplace.
- Increase paid parental leave as it increases productivity, improves mental and physical health, supports greater work/life balance, and provides work stability.
- Mentor business leaders on how to navigate the hiring process to appeal to a diverse pool of candidates (e.g., speaking to applicants, crafting job descriptions).
- Make wellbeing and accessing resources part of workplace culture.
- Promote gender-neutral occupations.
- Provide access and opportunities to leadership positions traditionally held by men (e.g., boards, commissions).

CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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

- Advocate for systematic change that happens progressively.
- Build coalitions by leveraging resources and relationships between individuals and organizations both locally and statewide.
- Celebrate women in leadership roles in all settings as women "can't be what they can't see."
- Collaborate with community and church leaders to address sensitive and controversial topics, policy, and doctrine.
- Communicate with city, county, and elected officials to discuss health and sex education in schools.
- Convene an interfaith group with female leaders of all religions to discuss religious female leadership and ways to promote girls and women.
- Educate women about the possibilities for leadership and growth within the framework of current religious and cultural conventions.
- Elevate the voices of others by speaking their names and sharing their accomplishments.
- Empower women to use their voices by inviting them to the table, treating them with grace, training others on empathy, reducing the pressure to always be right, and asking a female to deliver a legislator's message.
- Engage with state-level leaders to discuss policies that support women and finding common ground as well as funding.
- Increase awareness and distribution of community resources to schools and nonprofits.
- Leverage positive peer pressure to help women in nonprofits.
- Normalize elevating minority voices.
- Remind the community about the importance of belonging and cultural responsiveness.
- Share networking opportunities to help women make connections with individuals and organizations.
- Support organizations that engage in sexual assault and domestic violence.
- Teach the growth mindset and how elevating one group elevates all; discourage fear-based or scarcity mindsets that limit growth.
- Translate resources into relevant languages for Weber County residents.
- Use existing programs for growing interpersonal connections and mentoring programs.
- Vote for female candidates.

CONCLUSION

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