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

Cache County, 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) 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 33 leaders and residents in Cache County, Utah. 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, health and wellbeing, business and economics, culture and religion, and community engagement.

**EDUCATION**

Ensuring that women complete high school and obtain college certificates and degrees is critically important to Cache County leaders and residents. Efforts in schools, colleges, and communities to support these efforts need to be strengthened. Because of cultural barriers, many young women do not finish their college education and face significant hurdles to return (e.g., funding, lack of childcare, societal expectations). Recommendations include:

- Help girls and young women clearly understand the benefits of completing college certificates and degrees.
- Create mentorship and internship programs that provide opportunities for girls and women to discuss options and opportunities, while also shifting community culture and building bridges.
- Inform girls of all ages about the variety of options they have for college majors, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Through education and activities, ignite an interest in and empower them to pursue degrees and careers they may not have considered.
- Utilize any opportunity to share these messages and options, including one-on-one discussions, high school days, education conferences, and career conventions.
- Support postsecondary education at all levels. In addition to the importance of comprehensive educational opportunities available at Utah State University, skill development through skill-based programs is also important so that women can learn, do, and then teach. For example, Bridgerland Technical College focuses on creating a strong pathway to jobs.
- Remove barriers for women to attend institutions of higher education by accepting partial and continuing education credits and awarding credit for work experience. Creating easier-to-finish degree programs would reduce the cost of completing their education.

**HEALTH & WELLBEING**

There is significant concern regarding the mental health of girls and women in Cache County who experience challenges such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Additionally, women are socialized to prioritize others before themselves, which often leads to them ignoring their own physical health, safety, and overall wellbeing. Participants were concerned about the wellbeing of girls and women who question their gender and identify as LGBTQ+. Domestic violence is also a significant concern as women continue to stay in harmful situations for a variety of reasons, including the lack of financial options and employable skills. Reasons for these challenges were discussed, including how the predominant religious culture may impact wellbeing if any gender bias, sexism, and discrimination.
When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Cache County, 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.