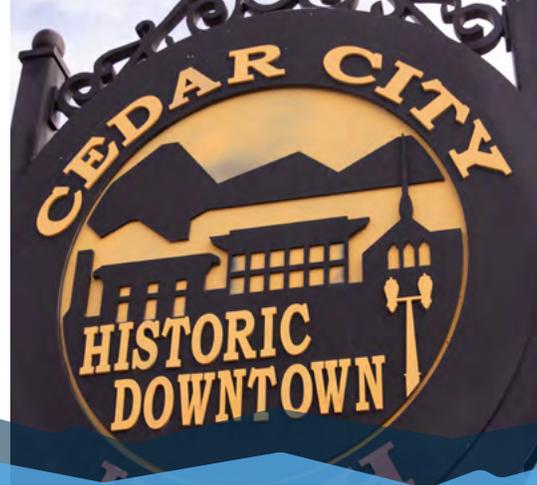


What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



NO. 31 | NOV. 1, 2023

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

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

Iron 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), Utah State University Iron County Extension, Southern Utah University’s Women’s Network (SUUWN), and Southwest Technical College hosted a think tank to collect ideas for individuals, groups, and organizations interested in supporting and empowering girls and women in their county.

This idea sheet is based on a 2023 gathering of 33 leaders in Iron 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: home and family, education, community engagement, business and economics, and culture.

HOME & FAMILY

Iron County parents are recognized as a vital influence in the lives of their daughters. Recommendations for parents and guardians include:

- Be involved in daughters’ education and emphasize the importance of graduating from both high school and college.
- Change the culture in the home so there is more equity in relationships as a positive example for both sons and daughters.
- Empower daughters by supporting them in their decisions and helping them pursue their dreams.
- Equip young families to make decisions that are best for them and their futures.
- Establish healthy norms as a model for gender roles at home.
- Have career discussions at home and tie it to income potential when choosing a career.
- Help daughters develop passions, interests, and positive attitudes to counter the increasing depression among youth.
- Teach bravery and empowerment so girls know they are resilient and can do hard things.
- Understand best practices in parenting.

EDUCATION

Leaders in Iron 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 for schools include:

- Advance positive role models to allow students to see people they can relate to who have been successful. Invite high school alumni to return to their alma maters to share success stories and inspire students.
- Allow students to opt-in to elective courses so they have more choice in their education.
- Develop soft skills in students like communication and face-to-face skills that will assist them with employment and relationships.
- Emphasize girls-only clubs, coding, career fairs, and other girls-only opportunities where girls can excel.
- Furnish young women with opportunities to explore passions and interests while learning skills to develop confidence and positive attitudes toward education.
- Give career aptitude and interest assessments and form partnerships with industry and mentors throughout the community to translate interests to employment.
- Host outreach activities in schools with diverse groups and individuals to help students be more comfortable with diversity and be exposed to a variety of people and ways of thinking.
- Offer financial assistance to women — including scholarships, grants, corporate sponsorships, and state support — for continuing their education and obtaining college degrees. Educate girls and young women about existing assistance programs.
- Provide digital literacy courses to help women know how to safely use the internet, including things such as blocking websites.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Residents recognize the importance of having girls and women engaged civically and politically in Iron County. Recommendations include:

- Create a flow chart of services for the entire community so girls, women, and families are aware of and know how to access services.
- Educate leaders in the community about women's issues and challenges, and engage them in finding solutions.
- Encourage women to make an impact in their community and understand the importance of taking risks.
- Enlist organizations to educate Utahns about the empowerment, independence, confidence, and strength of girls and women.
- Expose girls and women to politics to help them get involved.
- Have accessible discussions about women's health, including information-sharing strategies and relationship building, along with positive messaging to help alleviate fear.
- Identify local groups that support women in leadership and civic participation. Help more women learn about and get involved with these groups.
- Invite women to participate in groups that provide leadership opportunities.
- Provide a support network for women running for political office, and continue to provide support after they are elected.
- Teach women about crisis management so they are more prepared to lead in these situations.
- Use church networks by connecting with religious leadership — including youth leadership — to involve them to have the biggest positive impact on girls and women.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business and finance sector, Iron County women struggle with limited financial knowledge and career opportunities. Recommendations for businesses and society include:

- Challenge businesses to do third-party gender wage gap analyses as a way to close the pay gap.
- Encourage women to look at data in making decisions.
- Give women education and training on the art of negotiation to help them progress in their employment.
- Have career fairs for women and girls to show them the opportunities and diverse career options and potential.
- Help women develop financial literacy regarding student loans and retirement planning.
- Inspire confidence in women to step into entrepreneurship and provide resources to assist them in starting their own businesses.
- Provide mentorship programs in the workplace so women can advance in their careers.
- Reduce women's financial dependence on multilevel marketing by helping them know about and be qualified for more reliable employment.

CULTURE

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

- Ask young women thoughtful questions so they know they matter.
- Battle perfectionism and the harm of unrealistic expectations.
- Build on common values as a way to bridge differences.
- Celebrate positive milestones and tell women's success stories.
- Champion and support all women in their own journeys.
- Connect networks and organizations that support girls, women, and families so that they are not working independently as silos but as a connected network for collective impact.
- Create an environment where young women see and can be inspired by other women's successes.
- Give young women words to empower them if they get pushback in their pursuit of their dreams.
- Help women feel safe showing their strengths and not downplaying their positive qualities.
- Increase women's confidence so they can feel comfortable asking for what they deserve.
- Recognize the importance of male allies and involve them to support positive attitude changes in the culture by supporting their wives, daughters, and granddaughters.
- Recognize women for their successes, which will in turn encourage them and help build their confidence.
- Share lived experience and recognize that lived experiences will be different from person to person. Each experience has value and is important to understand and recognize.
- Support women in planning and preparing for their financial futures by valuing the long-term importance of higher education.
- Value and recognize women for their contributions in the home, workplace, and community.

CONCLUSION

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

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

Thank you to Crystal Koenig and Mary Pearson of Southern Utah University's Women's Network; Kathy Riggs of Utah State University's Iron County Extension; Tessa Douglas of Southwest Technical College; and to the many collaborators and partners in Iron County who supported the community conversation.

Report authors: Deborah Lin and Dr. Susan R. Madsen.