

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

Rich 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 - Rich County hosted a think tank 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 2024 gathering in Rich County with input from 20 individuals. As Utah's third smallest county with a wide geographic spread, this included women from across the 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, culture and community engagement, health and wellbeing, and business and economics.

HOME & FAMILY

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

- Balance and limit access to media images and messaging and help children and youth understand, manage, and process what they see and feel.
- Be aware of behaviors and signs that a child is struggling with a frightening or traumatic experience and needs additional support. Reach out to a healthcare provider or to a counselor experienced with children if help is needed.
- Build parental knowledge of early childhood development to improve positive parenting practices through community-based classes.
- Create an environment of safety and consistency so the home is a place where children are physically, socially, and emotionally secure, leading to healthy development and a successful future.
- Determine a time and place where children can bring any questions to adults, allowing them to turn to parents as a resource and not struggle alone.
- Develop confidence and self-esteem in girls by pointing out their strengths and abilities, encouraging them to aspire to what they are naturally good at.
- Empower daughters to self-advocate so they can stand up for themselves.
- Encourage girls and young women to dream big and set goals, while also creating realistic expectations for their futures.
- Foster emotional intelligence and healthy masculine stereotypes by allowing sons and men to communicate their emotions and vulnerabilities without fear of being judged. Identify opportunities for daughters to experience successes and achievements and celebrate those milestones.
- Model gender-neutral roles and responsibilities by sharing workloads. Have open discussions at home about the way chores are divided. Set expectations that children and adults share responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, yardwork, and taking out the trash.
- Reduce socialized gender norms by encouraging girls and young women to participate in nontraditional activities at home and in the community.
- Talk to teens about the stereotypes they encounter at school, on television, or while shopping, and work on developing empathy.
- Teach boys how to be an ally for girls. Brainstorm strategies for them to use when they hear others make a degrading comment.
- Value the importance of laughter and fun and how it can help reduce stress and build positive communication.

EDUCATION

Leaders in Rich 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:

- Build examples of historical and local women who have succeeded in a variety of fields and settings into K-12 curriculum.
- Develop robust curriculum regarding healthy relationships for both boys and girls. Include prevention lessons on sexual abuse and trafficking, collaborating with community nonprofits.
- Emphasize self-worth and possibilities for their future to girls and young women at a younger age.
- Establish and disseminate a comprehensive list of mentors who are local, regional, or otherwise available to support students in their fields of interest.
- Increase awareness of opportunities that exist for girls (e.g., after-school clubs, 4-H, extracurricular activities, and sports). Utilize resources to provide safety and community for young women.
- Promote the importance of developing skills to cope with feelings, talk about challenges, and interact with others, especially for girls and young women who learn and think differently, so they can build self-esteem.

CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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

- Create activities to connect women in social and service-related settings such as Junior League, Bunco groups, monthly lunches, and mom's night out to build connections, develop leadership, help solve problems, and raise opportunities for one another.
- Promote or develop community groups that support and educate women about social issues (e.g., gender, women's challenges) and provide safe spaces to voice and share their beliefs and experiences.
- Question cultural practices around traditional roles, not imposing them on girls or women.
- Reinforce developing leadership in girls and women.
- Recognize more women in leadership in churches, schools, and other settings so girls and young women can see themselves as leaders in the community and professionally.
- Spotlight male allies in the community.
- Teach women to recognize their value.
- Understand and celebrate the importance of both religious diversity and general diversity within the community.
- Welcome newcomers to the community and find ways to work towards integrating diverse opinions instead of minimizing them.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Concern over the physical wellbeing of girls and women in Rich County emerged as a primary theme. Recommendations include:

- Attend available programs on increasing adult mental health to learn how to make a difference.
- Combat suicidal ideation by sharing information and resources from mental health experts with people in all sectors of the county.
- Destigmatize accessing mental health services.
- Educate the community about consent, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse and assault. Address the sexualization of girls and women.
- Eliminate secrets about abuse of any kind. Break the silence.
- Engage and support organizations that sponsor educational programs about where and how to turn for help with sexual assault and domestic violence (e.g., support, housing, and resources) so that community members can recover and eventually thrive.
- Prioritize self-care as it teaches kindness toward oneself, builds self-confidence and resilience, protects mental health, and helps women be more prepared to help those around them.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, Rich County women struggle with limited opportunities for internal advancement and leadership. Recommendations include:

- Address the conflicting ideals, fears, and myths around childcare from both society and parents.
- Explore opportunities afforded by remote work which may afford greater advancement and pay.
- Increase the number of women starting businesses by providing resources, tools, and support.
- Promote a mindset shift with no restrictions on the career options available to young women and women. Eliminate labels such as a "man's job" or a "woman's job." Question gender-based assumptions about women's professional capabilities.

CONCLUSION

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

Thank you to USU Extension - Rich County and to the many collaborators and partners in Rich County who supported the community conversation. Report authors: Amy Anderson & Dr. Susan R. Madsen.