

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



NO. 41 | SEPTEMBER 3, 2024

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

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Wasatch 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 Intermountain Heber Valley Hospital 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 of 42 leaders in Wasatch 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, health and wellbeing, culture and community engagement, and business and economics.

HOME & FAMILY

In Wasatch County, parents are recognized as the most powerful influences on the lives of their daughters.

Recommendations include:

- Change cultural norms and stop self-imposed sexism at home by sharing household responsibilities.
- Empower girls to take risks, challenge themselves, and view disappointment as an opportunity for growth.
- Encourage girls and women to express their thoughts, contributions, and goals. Discourage dumbing down; encourage expressing pride in their talents.
- Ensure daughters and sons understand that women do not have to choose between motherhood and other roles such as being a college student, employee, or volunteer. Women can fulfill multiple roles.
- Prioritize children's education, encouraging a focus on homework and providing a supportive environment.
- Stress the value of ongoing education of all types, including academic and life skills; teach young women that education will serve them in all areas of their lives.

EDUCATION

Leaders in Wasatch 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:

- Acknowledge the importance of financial literacy education, healthy relationship curriculum, mental health awareness, and life skill coursework for students and incorporate it in the curriculum.
- Develop fact sheets and educational information for parents on the lack of gender equity in STEM fields and the enrollment disparity in middle school and high school classes so they can address the inequality.
- Emphasize within the school district the importance of higher education and lifelong learning for all students from elementary school on.
- Enable young girls to envision the wide range of possibilities ahead of them, both through education and enrichment activities. Focus on leadership development.
- Encourage school counselors to be deliberate in conversations with girls and young women about the importance of college education while developing life plans and goals.
- Explore existing community and regional resources and partner with programs like Girls on the Run to build self-confidence.
- Hold career, college, and trade fairs, and include community organizations that can highlight the variety of professions and opportunities available.
- Invite community leaders to mentor students. Prioritize engaging strong female leaders and encourage pairing students with mentors of the opposite sex.
- Minimize the impact of social media on teens and young adults, including educating youth on identifying and reporting bullying and sexism.
- Share data on the gender disparities in educational success and enrollment in Utah with parents and faculty.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

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

- Distribute information on community resources that combat domestic violence and sexual assault and encourage women to access support.
- Educate girls from elementary school onward to focus on strengthening a healthy body and mind.
- Encourage regular and routine healthcare visits for daughters and model by completing annual checkups and testing.
- Normalize healthy life balance for women – balancing work, family, and self in all stages of life.
- Strengthen girls' and women's mental health by teaching them to be courageous and assertive, advocate for themselves, negotiate, and not fear rejection.

CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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

- Build confidence in women to encourage volunteerism in the community while also developing transferable skills.
- Celebrate the diverse types of work that women are engaged in, including both paid and unpaid work, removing stereotypes that divide them.
- Connect women with opportunities to learn from other women so they can more easily pursue education and develop life skills. Purposefully model possibilities.
- Eliminate ageism, recognizing the contributions and wisdom of older women.
- Encourage local religions to identify areas where girls and women may be marginalized, find opportunities to make positive change, and allow girls and young women of all faiths to see their potential and their options.
- Gather interfaith women together to share and support the spiritual needs of girls and women.
- Help women and girls recognize where they can become civically engaged alongside their other priorities. Facilitate a mindset not of "either/or" but rather an "and" mentality, opening the door for women to consider a run for public office.
- Motivate male allies to support women in politics, business, and other leadership roles in the community.
- Present opportunities for women to share stories of disenfranchisement, sexism, pay disparity, and financial challenges, along with examples of their resilience.
- Promote or develop community groups that support and educate women about social issues (e.g., gender, women's rights), and provide safe spaces to voice and stand up for their beliefs.

- Teach women and girls to confidently share their thoughts and opinions rather than defer to boys and men.
- Value the inherent nature of every individual, regardless of gender, faith, or other factors, both within religious organizations and the broader community.
- Watch our words to eliminate damaging conversations and learn how to respond to sexist comments in a manner that helps shift behavior.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

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

- Address the pay gap between men and women, which may discourage women from participating in the workforce.
- Debunk the myth that that women of all ages cannot contribute to the workplace. Support accommodations in the workplace that encourage part-time or full-time participation.
- Eliminate workplace barriers for single working mothers, including unaffordable childcare; unpredictable work schedules; lack of work experience, job skills, and knowledge of workplace norms; and perceived discrimination.
- Implement and provide policies, procedures, and resources to create family-friendly and flexible work environments supporting women's needs, including supporting hybrid work.
- Invite high school and college-age women to join the Wasatch Business Alliance to build the future workforce.
- Make certain the business community is open to women in all professions. Eliminate the idea that there are specific jobs for men and separate jobs for women.
- Mentor women on how to engage professionally in the workplace, how to re-enter the workforce, and how to communicate their accomplishments, skills, and abilities in a professional manner that demonstrates transferable skills. Facilitate intergenerational mentoring.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Wasatch 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 Intermountain Heber Valley Hospital and to the many collaborators and partners in Wasatch County who supported the community conversation. Report authors: Amy Z. Anderson and Dr. Susan R. Madsen.