

Usha Menon with her sons  
From left: Anand, Akshay  
and Adhir



# HELPING *Charities*

*Meet this dynamic woman  
whose business has a heart.*

By **SUNAINA ANAND**

**Being uprooted from your country,** your life, family and friends - they say is not easy. Here's someone who rose to the challenge, honed her skills and strove for excellence in her field of work.

Having moved to Singapore way back in 1987, this confident Bombayite faced what all expatriates on dependent passes face - lack of job opportunities.

"Having reviewed my options I decided to volunteer for a local charity

called Community Chest. Since my father was a very philanthropic man, doing social service had been ingrained in me since I was a child. I worked two days a week, for no money for over a year, before the Chairman noticed my work and gave me a full-time position as an entry level executive," says Usha Menon, executive chairperson, Management Centre Asia (MC Asia), a management consultancy in Singapore that works exclusively with non-profit

organisations (NPOs).

Within 10 years she was promoted to senior management in the organisation. "Even while I worked for Community Chest, I volunteered for others that needed help, advising them in strategy direction and successful management," she added.

All that volunteer work didn't go in vain for soon enough she was head hunted by Habitat for Humanity as the Regional Director for Asia Pacific and was entrusted with the responsibility of setting up their Singapore office along with looking after the affairs of 26 other countries in Asia-Pacific.

"Habitat for Humanity (HFH), as the name implies is a shelter organisation, hence I worked on many

projects while I was with them, Jimmy Carter project, Tsunami rebuilding to name a few," says Menon.

Having worked with HFH for a decade Menon decided to go independent, "The birth of my third son sealed my decision. I had been contemplating setting up my own organisation for a while but kept shirking it until my son was born. After his birth my only priority was to spend quality time with him, which would be virtually impossible in my previous role as the Regional Director, as it involved a lot of travelling," she adds.

Menon went on to set up MC Asia and is the executive chairman of the firm. "We work with NPOs and help them through strategy building, management consultancy, fund raising – the whole process," says she.

"We also have for-profit clients, namely private banks and multinational organisations. We train private bankers and relationship managers on how to advise their clients when it comes to investing in NPO's. To begin with they themselves have to understand how NPOs work, only then can they advise their clients suitably," says she.

"Even for us, it is very essential to know what the ground reality is, so we can skillfully strategise for NPOs. The development tools might be the same but the market rarely ever is, hence it is important that we adapt ourselves," adds Menon.

The Economic Development Board of Singapore too is very involved in encouraging international NPOs to set up here. "Today, the total income of the charities sector in Singapore is over \$9 billion," adds Menon.

No wonder her company has a very strong portfolio of clients locally and internationally. Among its many clients are Amnesty international, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, British Council, Community Chest and Credit Suisse. "We don't believe in being second best, and our success rate ensures that the big clients choose us over others," says she.

Menon also serves on the board of

Habitat for Humanity. "My vision is to help charities become self-sufficient, by helping them raise funds as well as strategising for them," she adds

Out of office she is a mother of three boys and a doting wife, "My husband, Murli Menon is my partner in success, he has always been a supportive spouse. We together strive to instill correct values in all our children and believe that you have to start teaching them while they are young, for them to grow up as compassionate and honourable

human beings," she added.

She signs off with valuable advice for those embarking on a career in NPO management, "Don't wait for the best to come, instead make the best of what you have. While you have your corporate career, you can also build a parallel volunteer experience in the philanthropic sector. Discover your passion and just go out there and volunteer. Doing good will only take you to greater heights. So keep the faith and work hard," signs off Menon. ■

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