



Rooted in Trust, Rising Together: The Yein Udaan–Women on Boards Story

A young founder. A post-pandemic surge

In one of Chennai's oldest urban settlements, over 3,000 families navigate daily challenges marked by poverty, addiction, and instability. Many children return from school to difficult home environments with limited support. Amidst this, one young woman chose to respond—not with sympathy, but with sustained action.



Vedika Agarwal, the founder of Yein Udaan, started it as a modest after-school program for 30 children. Her dream was to create a safe space where these children could learn, play, thrive, and heal. It was transformative but straightforward. But in 2022, as schools reopened again post-pandemic, the numbers surged—over 100 children arrived overnight, and within months, the number touched 400.

Although Vedika was overjoyed, she was left overwhelmed by the amount of work she was putting in. Fundraising, curriculum, operations, team building, trauma counselling—she was doing everything alone. There was no advisory board. No formal governance structure. Just urgency, heart, and a mounting emotional toll on her.

“I felt like a headless chicken,” she recalls. “Everything was growing rapidly—except my ability to hold it all together.”

And so, she reached out.

A leadership shift. A governance partnership.

At this juncture, Vedika discovered the Women on Boards (WoB) program—an initiative by the Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), which aims at strengthening governance and management in the social sector. This is done by placing senior women professionals on nonprofit boards and advisory bodies.

That's how she met **Amrita Sabnavis**, a WoB Cohort 3 alumna and client account lead at Haqdarshak Empowerment Solutions Pvt. Ltd, with over 30 years of experience in finance, banking, and private equity. Amrita wasn't looking for a board title—she was looking for meaning and a transformative journey.



Their match was less about credentials, more about chemistry.

“I told myself I’m not here to give advice,” says Amrita. “I’m here to listen. To learn. And to show up—consistently and without ego.”

And that's what she did.

Holding space before shaping strategy

Amrita's first few months were about presence and showing up. She spent time absorbing and understanding Vedika's context, energy, vision, and philosophy—without asking for quarterly reports or dashboards. She listened to Vedika's fears. Validated her instincts. Reframed complexity into clarity.

And slowly, the nature of their conversations began to shift—from ***“How do I survive this week?”*** to ***“What will this look like in five years?”***

Together, they:

- Reimagined Yein Udaan's **theory of change**—moving from scale-first to depth-first programming.
- Framed a compelling **communications strategy** that embraced authenticity and avoided tokenism.
- Supported the curation of a **values-aligned advisory board**, not just high-profile names.



- Reviewed and rehearsed **Vedika's TEDx Talk**, helping her find her public voice with confidence.
- Discussed difficult HR calls, including letting go of team members, with calm and clarity.
- Drafted a bold yet grounded 2029 vision—to reach **all 3,000 children** in the community.

Amrita didn't act as a superior. She became a thought partner. A mirror. A mentor. Sometimes, a gentle nudge. Sometimes, just a text: "How are you doing this week?"

Not just a founder. Not just an advisor. A shared evolution.

Vedika had spent over a decade embedded in the community—visiting homes, walking dusty lanes, drinking tea with mothers, holding space for children when no one else did. Many of these children live with daily trauma. **Over 90% of their fathers struggle with addiction.** Many experience physical or emotional abuse. For some, Yein Udaan is the only place they feel safe and at home.



In February 2025, Vedika celebrated 10 years of working in the community. Her first cohort of children had graduated from school—one had joined the police, two had returned to volunteer at Yein Udaan. And with Amrita's support, she had made one of her most important decisions yet—onboarding a co-founder, transitioning from a solo founder model to shared stewardship.

Amrita, too, was transformed.

"I thought I was coming in to give back," she reflects. "But I ended up receiving so much more. Courage. Clarity. Conviction. Watching Vedika lead with grace has been a masterclass."

More than governance: A cultural reimagining

The WoB–Yein Udaan partnership went beyond setting up a board—it shifted focus from individuals to systems.

"It's not about professionalising founders," says Amrita. "It's about professionalising systems so founders can lead with heart—without burning out."

The impact is clear. Yein Udaan's board is now active, aligned, and mission-driven. Funders are recognising the organisation's growth, and CSR partners are engaging in governance. Most importantly, Vedika no longer leads alone. She leads with support.

What This Story Teaches Us

This story highlights the shared responsibility of the founder(s), advisors, and the wider sector. It shows how intentional leadership, empathetic guidance, and inclusive governance can together transform an organisation's journey.

For Founders:

*Leading with Intention
and Alignment*

- **Start building your board when you're prepared to engage deeply**, not when the urgency strikes.
- **Prioritising shared values and vision**—boards thrive when members resonate with your mission.
- **Nurturing relationships with your board**—meaningful engagement creates shared ownership and strategic clarity.

For Advisors:

*Serving with Empathy
and Presence*

- **Leading with empathy and openness**—your presence is often more potent than your plan.
- **Creating space for listening and reflection**—founders often find clarity when simply heard.
- **Offering support as a steady mirror**—not to direct, but to reflect, encourage, and co-create.

For the Sector:

*Advancing Governance
with Care and Inclusion*

- **Encouraging more nonprofit organisations to activate advisory boards**—they can be powerful enablers of growth and sustainability.
- **Championing gender-diverse leadership**—inclusive boards are proven to enhance performance, trust, and accountability.
- **Investing in supportive ecosystems for young leaders**—with the proper backing, their ideas can transform communities and redefine impact.

Today, Yein Udaan Stands Taller



LEADERSHIP

Turned from founder-driven to co-led, with support systems in place



GOVERNANCE

Turned from no board to a thoughtfully curated, values-aligned advisory group



STRATEGY

Transformed from reactive to visionary—serving 400+ now, aiming for 3,000 by 2029



CULTURE

Turned from burnout to balance—from doing alone to doing together

The Bigger Picture

In a sector where passion often outpaces structure, this partnership shows that sustainable change emerges when empathy and experience meet, when founders are not left to shoulder the weight of transformation alone, and when governance is reimagined as an enabler rather than an obligation.

The bigger picture, therefore, is not just about scaling an organisation but about shaping a culture—where young leaders can dream boldly, where boards nurture rather than dictate, and where communities thrive because leadership is shared, values are held, and resilience is built into the very fabric of change.

