

21st CENTURY WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP & LEADERSHIP

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Dr. Banafsheh Azizi, Non-Profit and Organizational Development Expert, Consultant, Middle East, Dr. Banafsheh Azizi provides a sense of normalcy to children with terminal illnesses so that kids can be kids no matter the health challenges they're facing.

She is COO of Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice, the only hospice in the Middle East that provides pediatric palliative and psychosocial care for children with life-threatening and life-limiting conditions. She also leads The Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital, which serves more than 60,000 children, siblings, and parents in hospitals across Kuwait through psychosocial services. From Azizi's start as a journalist to consulting, and to eventually returning to the Middle East to help lead three nonprofits, one of her core values has always been giving back to society in whatever capacity she could. Azizi, who is Iranian-American, was born in the United Kingdom and raised in Kuwait. When she was 18, she left Kuwait to continue her education in the U.S. at Georgia Tech. After earning her bachelor's and master's in International Affairs in 2004 and 2008, respectively, she began a career in journalism at CNN International, CBS 46 Atlanta, and CBS News. From there, she joined Booz Allen Hamilton in Washington, D.C., to provide consulting in the areas of strategy, policy, and strategic communication. In 2012, she made a personal decision to return to the Middle East. "It was time to go back and apply what I'd learned in the community I was raised in," says Azizi. She joined the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital in 2015 and was promoted this year to her current position. She is most proud of building a volunteer program with the U.S. military in Kuwait. Through the program, thousands of U.S. servicemen and servicewomen provide play for hospitalized children and their families in Kuwait. "The program puts aside the differences in politics, religion, culture, and joins people together based on their profound desire to make a difference," Azizi says. Azizi draws upon her values as guiding principles in her leadership. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in Leadership and Learning in Organizations at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. "My commitment to public service is based on my core belief of giving back to my society, and all the professional decisions I made, throughout my professional career, can be traced back to my values," Azizi says. "With my success came a lot of failures. But you just have to find your voice and know your values"