



Om Soun



Om Soun picks up the fuchsia silk, looks at the shining, lustrous fabric in the light and smiles as she discusses the fabric with the designer for Hagar Design's new range of bags. Om Soun, 38 years old, works as a purchasing agent for Hagar Design and is one of business' longest serving staff members. Yet, less than ten years ago, Om Soun and her three children were struggling to survive as they lived on the streets in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh.

Like many of the disadvantaged women training and working at Hagar Design, Om Soun's story is one of struggle and hope. Having tragically lost ten siblings during the Khmer Rouge period, Om Soun met her husband while living at a refugee camp with her father and remaining three siblings. Staying at the refugee camp until 1993, Om Soun married and had two children.

With a hope of starting a new life and giving her children a better future, Om Soun moved to Phnom Penh with her young family. Unable to find a job and with no money to rent a house, Om Soun's husband was forced to move back to the provinces to look for work while Om Soun and her children had to move in with her mother-in-law. Left with no means of support, the relationship with her mother-in-law quickly started to deteriorate once Om Soun found out she was expecting her third child. Resenting providing housing and food for Om Soun and her children, her mother-in-law made the living situation extremely difficult and, finally, the small family was forced to leave. Pregnant and alone with two small children to feed, Om Soun's only option was

Having minimal education and vocational skills, the only job Om Soun could find was washing dishes in a noodle restaurant. After a few months of struggling to survive on the streets, a staff member from the Hagar Shelter saw Om Soun and her children and told them about Hagar Shelter. In 1996, Om Soun and her children finally started their new life. Moving into the Hagar Shelter for six months, Om Soun received counseling while undertaking literacy classes and vocational training in sewing. Her children started attending school at Hagar Shelter and her new baby was looked after in childcare while Om Soun attended her training. "Before coming to Hagar Shelter I was very miserable and upset all the time. It was hard to live with my husband's family...it just made me really unhappy. Now I feel much more comfortable and happier," explained Om Soun.

All names have been changed to protect the privacy and security of the beneficiary concerned.