

# Srey Neang



**Srey Neang** was orphaned as a young child when her father sold her at a border camp. She was bought by an old woman who took her to live in Pailin province in northeast Cambodia. The old woman told Srey Neang that she would look after her like her own daughter. However, the old woman treated her badly. Srey Neang's life was very difficult and she was very unhappy.

When Srey Neang was 15 years old, a neighbor invited her to stay in another northern province - Siem Reap. The old woman told Srey Neang that she agreed to let her go. Srey Neang was very excited about visiting Siem Reap, but was disappointed when the neighbor told her there was a change of plans. Instead of taking her to Siem Reap, the neighbor took her to yet another province and said they would stay there for a few days and then travel to Siem Reap.

Days later the neighbor said she would finally go to Siem Reap. The neighbor arranged for Srey Neang to have her hair and make-up done and to find a nice dress for her to wear when she visited Siem Reap. In anticipation of the visit, Srey Neang was very excited, but, instead of going to Siem Reap that night, an old man came to the house. Srey Neang realized she was never going to Siem Reap; she now knew the neighbor had bought her from the old woman and now she was forced to have sex with men. When Srey Neang saw the man, she began to cry; the old man felt sorry for her and said that he would not rape her and left the house.

The house was like a prison. Other girls living in the house were also being forced to work as prostitutes. Police in the area heard that this location was operating as a brothel and came to raid the house. The police rescued her and the other girls, but later the owner of the brothel came to the police and took Srey Neang back.

Srey Neang begged the owner of the brothel to take her to Siem Reap, but he told her that he did not have enough money to do so. A man came to the brothel and said that he wanted to sleep with her every day over the next week. Each night he came to the brothel, he would cut away a piece of wire that kept the girls locked inside the brothel. After a week, the hole was big enough for her and another girl to escape. The girls found a taxi driver who helped them escape first to yet another province and then to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city. The taxi driver took her to his aunt's house and told her to stay there. He said she would be safe there.

A few days later he came back and told her that he had found a job for her. He told her that because of her experience as a prostitute, she would once again work as a prostitute. She agreed to do it for one more month. Every week she would have to pay \$30 of her earnings to the taxi driver who helped her. After six months, Srey Neang ran away and went to stay with a friend in Phnom Penh. She had a relationship with her friend's husband and soon became pregnant with his son. After she gave birth to the baby, the man left her and went back to his wife. She was alone with her baby, but she had no money and no place to go. She slept on the street outside the hospital until one day a doctor told her about Hagar Project.

Srey Neang arrived at Hagar where she lived with other women in similar situations, received counselling and child care, and attended literacy classes. She also was enrolled in vocational training to learn sewing skills. When she completed her sewing training, she was qualified to work as a seamstress at Hagar Design. With the money she now earned, she can pay her rent, send her son to school, and make sure he is well fed. Her life had been difficult, but Srey Neang is positive about the future and her ability to provide for herself and her child.