



look after ourselves. A neighbour took me in, and then I became a monk to continue my education. I became friends with Jon Ryder, an American dentist who was volunteering in Cambodia. I knew I needed further education to become a better leader, and Jon helped me. I received scholarships to the US that enabled me to earn a bachelor's degree in NGO management in Iowa and a master's in public administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

GIVE HELP
To learn more about volunteer opportunities and how to donate, visit lifeandhopeangkor.org

What inspires you to help the youth?

I want to help Cambodia reach its highest potential. To alleviate poverty, I co-founded the Life and Hope Association and the Park Hyatt Siem Reap Sewing School, among other initiatives. The monks and I believe that children are the future of our country, and that women are the mothers of our nation. Changing a girl's life will change her future family, her community and the society.



Why a sewing school?

Learning to sew is a good reason for a young woman to leave her village and poverty. Many girls in Cambodia have not even been to primary school and they feel powerless. By giving a girl skills with which she can make money, we empower her. We teach hope, meaning, values and confidence, and we see our students grow.

You've recently left the monkhood. What's next?

I retired from being a monk to serve the Cambodian people in a broader role, as an advisor to the Ministry of Commerce.

Turning life around

In the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, three-year-old Hoern Somnieng was abandoned. What followed is an inspiring journey of pursuing a passion

WORDS JOHANNA READ

Though the Khmer Rouge regime ended more than 30 years ago, its effects are still palpable in today's Cambodia. It is one of the world's poorest countries and its citizens have limited education. Hoern Somnieng, co-founder of Life and Hope Association – an NGO committed to breaking the cycle of poverty – hopes to change that. The former monk's early life was a struggle for survival, but that did not deter him from following his passion and giving back to the community.

Your family was torn apart when you were young. But you became a monk and studied in Harvard. Tell us your story.

When I was three, my mother left our family. The next day, my grandmother told me and my siblings that she was no longer able to feed us, that we needed to