

Former football player Anyier Yuol wins Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition

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Australia for UNHCR and SBS are delighted to announce that Anyier Yuol – former football player, PhD candidate, model and founder of a beauty pageant for women of colour – is the winner of the 2023 Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition.

The award is named after legendary SBS sports broadcaster Les Murray AM, himself a former refugee from Hungary, and recognises an outstanding former refugee who is raising awareness of the plight of forcibly displaced people.

“SBS is thrilled to sponsor the Les Murray Award and I congratulate Ms Yuol on her work advocating on behalf refugees which has benefited many, both in her local community and also in wider international forums,” said James Taylor, Managing Director of SBS.

“Les Murray himself was champion for refugees and we’re pleased to keep his legacy alive through this important award. Ms Yuol is a worthy recipient and SBS is proud to recognise her valuable contribution.”

“There were many outstanding people nominated for the Les Murray award this year,” said Trudi Mitchell, CEO of Australia for UNHCR. “The judges noted Ms Yuol’s many accomplishments but they were also impressed with her energy, her positivity and her determination to make a difference for refugees.”



Anyier Yuol, winner of the 2023 Australia for UNHCR – SBS Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition

Anyier Yuol’s family is from South Sudan. She was born in a refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya. When both her parents passed away, her aunt took care of her before she came to Australia on a humanitarian visa at age 10.

Moving to Blacktown in Western Sydney, Anyier found a love for football and even recalls waking up at early in the morning to watch Les Murray commentate the football on SBS.

“Les Murray is an icon. I used to wake up at 4am to watch his World Cup broadcasts on SBS. It’s such an honour to be able to receive this award because he was a refugee advocate and a passionate football fan who understood how sport plays an important part in refugee communities,” said Ms Yuol.

Anyier represented Australia at the FIFA Football for Hope Festival in 2010 at the World Cup in South Africa and launched an initiative called Football in the Park to provide a safe space to talk about challenges in the community.

Her work in the community transcends sport – Anyier also created Miss Sahara, a beauty pageant for African-Australian women, and launched Anyier Model Management to offer under-represented groups greater professional opportunities.

Ms Yuol was also the former Chair of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) at age 25 and consulted with hundreds of refugee women from diverse backgrounds to inform national policy and to advocate internationally.

“With ANCORW, I was able to collect the voices of refugee women and take them to Geneva and share them at the Global Refugee Forum. It gave me the strength and platform to do even more,” she said.

Ms Yuol is now completing a PhD at Western Sydney University on bride price practices in South Sudanese communities in Australia and created Lead Beyond Education – a small charity addressing barriers to education and leadership for culturally and racially marginalised people, both in Australia and in refugee camps.

“There are so many conflicts, so many vulnerable people displaced. It is the work of every individual – whether you’re giving money or volunteering your time – to contribute to the work of agencies like UNHCR,” she said.

The award was judged by Australia for UNHCR Deputy Chair Kate Dundas, UNHCR Regional Representative Adrian Edwards, SBS Director of Language and Audio Content David Hua, and former refugee Ann Odong.

Anyier Yuol will appear at Australia for UNHCR’s World Refugee Day event on Thursday 15 June.

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