

Meet the winner of the Les Murray Award

INSIDE:

- Twelve years of crisis for Syrians
- Your gifts bring winter warmth to refugees
- Protecting children forced to flee
- The Australian doctor mentoring a refugee student



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ON THE COVER:

Anyier Yuol is the winner of the 2023 Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition.

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WELCOME

In February, we reached a significant milestone – one year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As you know, this war has created a massive displacement crisis, with one-third of Ukraine's population forced to flee. Over this last year, your support for the people of Ukraine has been unwavering. Your gifts have helped UNHCR deliver emergency supplies, cash assistance and psychosocial aid to more than four million people in Ukraine. This includes the vital assistance you recently provided to ensure vulnerable families had shelter, heating and warm clothing throughout winter. Your winter aid also reached displaced Afghans and Syrians – enabling UNHCR to weatherproof homes, distribute cash assistance, and provide thermal blankets and sleeping bags. These gifts were literally life-saving in regions where temperatures can plummet to minus 20 degrees Celsius.

Freezing temperatures were also gripping Türkiye and Syria when two powerful earthquakes struck the region in early February. More than 54,000 people died and millions of people had their homes damaged or destroyed. You responded swiftly, helping UNHCR deploy emergency aid to hard-hit areas in both countries. This is the latest crisis for Syrians who have already endured 12 years of conflict. In this issue, we look at the mounting challenges displaced families face in Syria and across the region, and how UNHCR's assistance is making a difference.

In the face of these emergencies, I'm very pleased to share some uplifting news. In this issue of *With You*, you'll meet the winner of the 2023 Australia for UNHCR – SBS Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition. Former South Sudanese refugee Anyier Yuol is driving change in many areas, from sports to academia, and was the judges' unanimous pick. Stories like this remind us all of the incredible strengths refugees bring to their new countries.

When I was in Jordan in January, I was privileged to meet Omar, a Syrian refugee and medical student. In this issue, you'll learn about how a UNHCR scholarship is giving Omar hope for the future. You'll also hear about how an Australian doctor has mentored Omar through our innovative Connecting Worlds app.

Finally, I am pleased to share an interview with one of our generous bequestors, Andrew Atkinson. After working as a peacekeeper in Timor-Leste and Iraq, Andrew chose to leave a gift in his Will to Australia for UNHCR. I hope you enjoy reading about Andrew's fascinating career and the legacy he wants to create for refugees.

Thank you for your support – it makes a world of difference.

Trudi Mitchell, CEO



UNHCR relief items arrive at a mosque hosting earthquake survivors in Aleppo, Syria.

© UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf

Rushing aid to earthquake survivors

AUSTRALIANS HAVE DONATED GENEROUSLY TO HELP FAMILIES IN SYRIA AND TÜRKIYE RECOVER FROM FEBRUARY’S DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKES.

Most people were asleep when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck near the Türkiye-Syria border in the early hours of 6 February. Another 7.5 magnitude quake struck just hours later. More than 54,000 people were killed. Those lucky enough to survive fled empty-handed into the freezing winter streets.

Lubana and Fayez are among the 8.8 million people in Syria affected by this disaster. The couple lived on the ground floor of a four-storey building in Latakia that was destroyed in the quake.

“It was like a bad dream,” said Lubana. “As if the house was made of salt and it crumbled like a biscuit. I felt as if bombs were exploding beneath us. We didn’t know what to do. We were sure we were going to die.”

Lubana said it was a miracle they survived. But Fayez’s brother, who lived on the top floor, wasn’t as lucky. He was killed, along with his wife and two children.

With your generous support, UNHCR rushed emergency supplies to survivors like Lubana and her family – many of whom were staying in schools or mosques converted into temporary accommodation. UNHCR sent 31,700 survival kits with thermal blankets, hygiene kits and other essential items to families in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama and Idlib. Your gifts also helped UNHCR assist displaced families with counselling and legal support.

In Türkiye, where nine million people have been affected by the earthquake, UNHCR provided government agencies with core relief items to distribute to those most in need. With your help, UNHCR deployed emergency aid from its stockpiles across the region, including 102,000 thermal blankets, 28,600 tents and 40,800 hygiene kits.

Syrian refugees are among those supporting UNHCR’s emergency response in Türkiye. Darin, who fled

“I felt as if bombs were exploding beneath us. We didn’t know what to do. We were sure we were going to die.”

to Türkiye nine years ago, has been working in a dispatch centre together with other refugees and Turkish locals.

“We want to help other people to get well as soon as possible,” she said. “We sort out the goods to be dispatched. Some of us also load them on vehicles and unload them to deliver to the affected people from the earthquakes.”

This disaster is a hammer blow for Syrians who have endured almost 12 years of war, as well as the Turkish communities who have generously hosted refugees fleeing the conflict. In this time of need, your gifts have been a lifeline.

“The devastation from the earthquake is nothing short of catastrophic,” said Kelly T. Clements, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees. “We thank those of you who have supported this operation. We will continue to work quickly with partners to provide as much assistance and support as we possibly can.” ■

THE DIFFERENCE YOU MADE

Om Saker and her children in their tent in Hatra, Iraq.

© UNHCR/Ahmed Ayad

Giving warmth and safety to freezing families

Winter brings even greater suffering to displaced families – many of whom live in flimsy tents after losing everything they own. Your generous donations to refugees in the Northern Hemisphere have provided life-saving aid to vulnerable people like Om Saker who are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Eight years ago, armed militants forced Om Saker and her children to flee from their village in western Iraq to a camp in Hatra in the north of the country.

“Before, we were living securely and we had water wells and were well-settled in our homes. When they came, they destroyed the village. Everything is totally gone.”

Since losing her home, Om Saker has struggled to provide for her three children on her own. Conditions are extremely difficult in their tent.

“I’m not living well here. Without a proper home, how can you feel comfortable? Sometimes, the plastic sheets start falling and you cannot stay here at all during the wind and the rain.”

This winter, your donations provided cash assistance to 43,000 displaced Iraqis like Om Saker, both within Iraq and in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Jordan.

“I felt so happy that I couldn’t sleep,” she said. “If we didn’t receive the

assistance, we could have died of hunger. It covered my needs for three to four months. I felt comfortable and didn’t need to ask anyone for anything.”

Your donations also helped UNHCR distribute cash assistance in Afghanistan, where the economy is in freefall and vulnerable families are taking out loans to cover essentials like food and shelter.

In Bamyán province – the highest region in Afghanistan and one of the coldest – 30-year-old Nekhbakhd didn’t know how she would provide for her six children. Her family had taken out a loan of 600,000 Afghanis (AUD\$10,000) for her father-in-law’s medical treatment in Kabul before he died and her husband, a casual labourer, was struggling to find work.

With your support, UNHCR provided cash assistance to more than 470,000 Afghans like Nekhbakhd, helping them pay debts and buy food, fuel and other winter essentials.

“It meant we could eat,” said Nekhbakhd. “It also helped us buy heating materials like coal and wood. It was very important for us.”

Your gifts have also supported families enduring their first winter at war in Ukraine. Your gifts helped UNHCR repair damaged homes, provide cash assistance, and distribute relief items such as warm clothes and thermal blankets. ■

“ If we didn’t receive the assistance, we could have died of hunger. It covered my needs for three to four months. I felt comfortable and didn’t need to ask anyone for anything. **”**

» YOUR WINTER DONATIONS HELPED UNHCR REACH:



1.8 million people, including Syrian and Iraqi refugees, across the Middle East and North Africa



1.4 million people in Ukraine with cash assistance, shelter and life-saving items



476,787 people in Afghanistan with winter cash assistance

You helped UNHCR reach over four million people in Ukraine

MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE STILL CAN'T RETURN HOME SAFELY. YOUR SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST SO MUCH.

With eight million people fleeing as refugees to Europe and another 5.4 million displaced within Ukraine, the emergency is far from over.

Since the outbreak of the war, Australia for UNHCR has raised over \$17 million to provide life-saving aid and protection for the people of Ukraine. With your support, UNHCR has reached 4.7 million people in Ukraine alone. From winter clothing to cash assistance, home repairs to counselling – your gifts have given displaced families a way to carry on.

With your support, UNHCR is assisting displaced people like Olga, a 47-year-old dental nurse and single mother. When the invasion began, Olga and her 16-year-old son Nik decided to remain at home in the town of Borodyanka.

“We were at home and there was this hit by a rocket...with an explosive wave,” said Olga. “Immediately, the windows in our kitchen were broken.”

Olga and Nik escaped to a village ten kilometres away but, soon after, they had to flee yet again to the capital city of Kyiv.

“It was impossible to sleep because of a constant fear inside. We were compelled to leave,” said Olga.

After staying with friends and family for a few weeks, Olga and Nik returned to Borodyanka. They were devastated to find their home so badly damaged that it was uninhabitable. There was also no power for several weeks, so they had to use an outdoor stove to boil water and keep warm.

With UNHCR’s help, Olga and Nik were able to repair their home. They are among the thousands of Ukrainian families who have received shelter support, which includes light to medium repairs on damaged homes, shelter materials such as tarpaulins, and improved sleeping places in accommodation centres.

“If it wasn’t for UNHCR, I wouldn’t have been able to repair the windows or the roof,” said Olga.” ■

THE DIFFERENCE YOU MADE



Olga, Nik and Princess inside their repaired home in Borodyanka.

© UNHCR/Diana Zeyneb Alhindawi

» WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

In February, UNHCR surveyed Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) on their future plans and key concerns. Here’s what they had to say.

- » **88% of refugees** don’t plan to return in the next three months
- » **70% of IDPs** don’t have sufficient income
- » **65% of refugees** want to return home one day
- » **12% of IDPs** plan to return home in the next three months
- » **20% of IDPs** who own homes say their property is either uninhabitable or completely destroyed



Anyier Yuol wins the Les Murray Award



“ To be recognised by Australia for UNHCR and SBS shows that what I’m doing is significant and that motivates me to do even more work, especially with women and girls. ”

Former South Sudanese refugee Anyier Yuol has won the 2023 Australia for UNHCR – SBS Les Murray Award for Refugee Recognition for her diverse achievements across sport, women’s empowerment and refugee advocacy.

“It was very surprising to win the award,” said Ms Yuol. “To be recognised by Australia for UNHCR and SBS shows that what I’m doing is significant and motivates me to do even more work, especially with women and girls.”

The former football player is a fitting recipient of the \$10,000 prize, which is named after beloved SBS sports commentator and Hungarian refugee Les Murray AM.

“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.”

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.

“Many outstanding people were nominated for this year’s Les Murray Award,” said Ms Dundas. “But the judges were unanimous in their decision to give the award to Anyier Yuol. She’s made a name for herself from the football field to the catwalk to the halls of academia. The judges were impressed with her many accomplishments as well as her energy, her positivity and her determination to make a difference for displaced people.”

Ms Yuol was born in a UNHCR camp in Kakuma, Kenya. After her parents died, her aunt looked after her and her older sister. Ms Yuol says she has happy memories of childhood, surrounded by family and friends.

“For me, it was peaceful. I had the love and support from those who matter. It’s only now that I realise the barriers that existed in the camp. My aunt always made sure we had the basic things we needed to survive.”

Ms Yuol came to Australia on a humanitarian visa at the age of 10 with her sister and her father’s family, eventually settling in Blacktown in western Sydney. She felt out of place but was determined to forge her own identity from a young age.

“It was a challenge to understand the Australian culture while trying to maintain my South Sudanese culture, particularly the Dinka culture, but overall I wanted to become my own person.”

Ms Yuol struggled at school but found an important way to connect with others – through sport. She had only seen boys playing sport in Kakuma and was surprised that it was part of the school curriculum. After recognising her potential, a family friend paid Ms Yuol’s club fees and took her to football training and games for six years.

“That was the first time someone believed in me. She knew I struggled in school – I didn’t start my schooling properly until I came to Australia – and saw that sport could give me a different avenue. I didn’t need to know English; I just needed to know left, right, forward, back. From there, I fell in love with football and began to explore how sport could engage young people, beyond just winning on a playing field.”

Ms Yuol excelled at football and became involved with Football United, an organisation that engages young people from diverse backgrounds through sport. Football United selected Ms Yuol to represent Australia at the FIFA Football for Hope Festival as part of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. When she returned to Australia, she received a scholarship to UNSW, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts, and launched the Football in the Park initiative, hosting games and providing a safe space to talk about challenges in the community.

Ms Yuol also began competing in beauty pageants, where she was often the only woman of colour. In 2018, she created a beauty pageant for African-Australian women called Miss Sahara to start a conversation about inclusion in the beauty and fashion industries, and to equip young women with leadership skills. She then launched Anyier Model Management to offer under-represented groups greater professional opportunities.

You can’t be neutral when it comes to issues of human rights. If you have the privilege and you have the voice, use it. If you have the privilege and you don’t know how to use it, then step aside and let us take the fight on.”

Ms Yuol has also become a passionate advocate for refugees. She says she is particularly proud of her work as the former Chair of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) – a role she took on when she was just 25.

As Chair, she consulted with hundreds of refugee women from different 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.”

Ms Yuol is now completing a PhD at Western Sydney University on bride price practices in South Sudanese communities in Australia. She has also 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.

The tireless Ms Yuol says everyone has a role to play in protecting refugees.

“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.

“You can’t be neutral when it comes to issues of human rights. If you have the privilege and you have the voice, use it. If you have the privilege and you don’t know how to use it, then step aside and let us take the fight on.” ■

Anyier Yuol will appear at our World Refugee Day event on Thursday 15 June. Visit unrefugees.org.au/wrd to book tickets or find out more.

In the Community

Anjilla sells handmade dolls to raise funds for UNHCR's work in Afghanistan.

© Australia for UNHCR



» ANJILLA'S DOLLS

Afghan-Australian Anjilla Seddeqi is raising money for the people of Afghanistan by designing and selling handmade dolls.

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021, Anjilla wanted to do something to combat her feeling of hopelessness. "Refugees have a very special place in my heart," said Anjilla. "As a child of refugees, the experience has given me an understanding of the difficulties and upheaval they face."

Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, Anjilla used her fashion network and skills to create Arezu Dolls dressed in traditional Afghan garb ('arezu' means 'wish' in Dari). The dolls are handmade by Afghan refugees living in India, using eco-friendly cotton the fashion industry would otherwise discard as waste.

After studying law, Anjilla worked as a legal representative for asylum seekers. As a distraction from this work, she began a couture line focused on modest dressing. "I wanted to highlight the beauty of my heritage, of the land, of the culture, because for far too long the narrative has been one of war and destruction. I wanted to humanise the people of Afghanistan."

You can purchase an Arezu Doll via Anjilla's Instagram account: [@anjillaseddeqi](https://www.instagram.com/anjillaseddeqi) ■



» ONLINE COMMUNITY RAISES \$23,000 FOR TÜRKIYE AND SYRIA

Okay Bears, an online community selling digital art to support important causes, has auctioned off a special artwork to support earthquake survivors in Türkiye and Syria.

Okay Bears sells its bear illustrations as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) – digital collectors' items that cannot be replicated. Within two days of the earthquakes, which struck near the Türkiye-Syria border on 6 February, the Okay Bears team had created and sold a bear designed to look like a UNHCR field worker.

"Okay Bears is a start-up that launched in 2022 with a vision to inspire hope through art and code," said Peter Gould, Okay Bears' Chief Communication Officer and Australia for UNHCR's Islamic Philanthropy Ambassador.

"Some of our community members are based in Türkiye and in the surrounding region. We saw the devastating news break and our immediate idea was to raise funds with an NFT auction, using a UNHCR-branded bear."

Okay Bears also created a second limited-edition artwork featuring a bear standing among the rubble.

"These two artworks raised over \$23,000 – something we're very grateful to be a part of. It brought many people from different backgrounds together." ■

» BEDDIE SCHOLARSHIP WINNER ANNOUNCED

Zabi Malik is the recipient of Australia for UNHCR's 2023 Beddie Scholarship, which enables a former refugee to complete a Bachelor of Arts at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS).

Zabi, 23, was born in Afghanistan and grew up in Adelaide. When he expressed an interest in acting, his mother encouraged him to pursue his passion. "The entertainment industry is not usually accepted or appreciated where I'm from," said Zabi. "But my mother said: 'Nothing seems to make you happy, go try this, you have always been interested in films.'"

While studying acting at the New York Film Academy, Zabi discovered the joy of being on both sides of the camera and is now determined to become a film director. He has already accomplished a lot, starring in the television series *A Troubled Town* and co-founding Huma Media, a company dedicated to producing content in Dari – all while stacking shelves at Aldi and studying full-time. The Australia for UNHCR Beddie Scholarship is valued at more than \$75,000. ■



© Zabi Malik

» WOMEN OF TROY: TELLING SURVIVORS' STORIES

Actor and Australia for UNHCR Special Representative **Marta Dusseldorp** has used her latest production, *Women of Troy*, to raise vital funds for Ukraine's refugees.

Adapted from the Greek tragedy produced by Euripides in 415 BC, *Women of Troy* is told not from the point-of-view of the heroic conquerors but from the perspective of the female survivors. The production also features a libretto by Kurdish refugee Behrouz Boochani, who spent almost seven years in detention on Manus Island.

Ms Dusseldorp says while *Women of Troy* is an ancient story it's relevant in the modern world. The characters have their homes destroyed – a reality currently being experienced by millions of people around the globe.

"There are more refugees than ever in the world – as we know, there are atrocities against women and children happening every day. What would we prioritise if we were torn out of our homes and thrown into no-man's land? The play brings you right into the present." ■

Marta Dusseldorp
as Andromache in
Women of Troy.



© Jesse Hunniford



© Australia for UNHCR

◀ Dr Asha Ram (second from right) with Hope Aid Unite supporters.

» HOPE AID UNITE
Tasmanian surgeon **Asha Ram** was glued to the news in August 2021 when the Taliban retook Afghanistan. Like millions of people around the world, she watched in horror as Kabul fell and thousands of desperate people tried to escape.

Dr Ram knew she needed to act, but she wasn't sure what she could do. After reading about how Ben Quilty was raising money for the UN Refugee Agency's emergency operation in Afghanistan, she contacted the Australian artist and he encouraged her to do the same.

Hope Aid Unite was born soon afterwards to raise money for refugees and displaced people around the world. The organisation is run by a group of passionate Tasmanian women determined to make a difference from their island home.

The group's most recent event was held in Hobart in March to mark International Women's Day and to raise money for Afghan women and children, including refugees living in Iran. Guests were able to buy raffle tickets and bid on auction items. Prizes included a print by Tasmanian artist Mandy Renard, accommodation at Peppers Silo Hotel in Launceston and a beautiful coat by Afghan-Australian designer Anjilla Seddeqi. ■



Mary Lou Byrne and Therese Briggs sell homemade rocky road to fundraise for refugees.

» ROCKY ROAD FOR REFUGEES

It all started 20 years ago when **Mary Lou Byrne** visited Villawood Immigration Detention Centre with her church group and met refugees who had fled their homes. She heard about their journeys to safety and the loved ones they left behind.

Ms Byrne enlisted her friend Therese Briggs and together they started organising trivia and film nights to raise money for UNHCR's work with displaced people. They were serving their own sweets at the events when they hit on a new fundraising idea – selling Ms Byrne's signature rocky road.

"The refugee situation has gotten worse since we first started," she said. "It's only something small that we're doing but you feel that money being raised hopefully makes a difference."

Their efforts have certainly had an impact. In the five years they've been selling rocky road for refugees, the women have raised \$34,000.

Ms Byrne said they chose to fundraise for Australia for UNHCR because of the UN Refugee Agency's strong presence on the ground during humanitarian emergencies.

"You always see the UNHCR tents when you see any clip on the news. I read recently that UNHCR come in first and they're the last ones to leave. They're good at coming in immediately and they stay," she said.

"If you want to fundraise for UNHCR, I'd suggest looking at something you already do... You just need to do a little bit more of that and put it towards a good cause." ■

A silent crisis: Children forced to flee alone

IN TIMES OF WAR, MANY CHILDREN ARE ORPHANED OR SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES. THOSE WHO FLEE ON THEIR OWN ARE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION. WITH YOUR SUPPORT, UNHCR IS PROTECTING UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND HELPING THEM REBUILD THEIR LIVES.

Nyamach has known more loss and sorrow than most people experience in a lifetime.

The 16-year-old from South Sudan lost her father in an armed attack and her mother to illness. When fighting broke out near her home in Upper Nile State in 2016, she fled to Ethiopia with her younger sister, 13-year-old Nyakoang. They are among 42,000 South Sudanese refugee children who have fled to Ethiopia on their own.

“When fighting reached our hometown, we left,” said Nyamach. “We just followed the crowds. It was very difficult. We fled with nothing.”

Nyamach is now the head of her small family. The sisters live in a UNHCR camp in the Gambella region, where they have access to food, water, healthcare and education. Nyamach makes sure that their house is immaculate and that they stay in school.

“I don’t want anybody to take care of me. I take care of my sister,” she said. “I feel responsible. If we don’t have enough food, I let her eat first. I like to see her happy, more than myself. I’m hoping for a good job one day.”

South Sudan’s conflict has had a devastating impact on children, who account for over half of the two million South Sudanese living in exile. Violence has robbed them of their families and taken their childhoods.

UNHCR strives to reconnect children with their families. If this isn’t possible, UNHCR tries to find safe homes for children with guardians or foster parents. UNHCR also helps children return to school, offers psychological support to help them deal with trauma, and provides child-friendly spaces where they can learn and play.

The playground is one of the few places where Nyamach can relax. “I feel happy on the playground because I play and forget all the things that worry me,” she said.

Like Nyamach, Anna fled South Sudan on her own. She was just 12 when armed forces attacked her village in the night. She fled with her mother and father to a neighbouring village but the fighting followed them and she lost sight of her parents in the chaos.

With no one to turn to, Anna began walking. The journey took days. She slept in the bushes and suffered fevers and nightmares. She missed her parents terribly.

When she reached the border, Anna found help through UNHCR. She received emergency aid and joined a loving foster family. Now, at 15, Anna is achieving good grades at school and hopes to become a doctor one day. She’ll always miss her parents but she has five siblings to play with and can sleep soundly at night, knowing she is safe. ■

> South Sudanese refugee sisters Nyamach (left) and Nyakoang outside their home in Gambella, Ethiopia.

✓ South Sudanese refugee Anna, 15, lives with a foster family in Gambella, Ethiopia

Visit unrefugees.org.au/children to find out more.



*I feel responsible.
If we do not
have enough
food to eat,
I let her eat first.
I like to see
her happy, more
than myself.”*

INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER AKINYI OLANG, UNHCR FIELD OFFICER IN ETHIOPIA

What does UNHCR do to protect unaccompanied and separated children?

We are there on a daily basis to safeguard the children against any ills. We are there to make sure that their protection needs are met, their basic needs are met, and they're well taken care of.

What is a story you'll always remember from your work?

I'll always remember a case that happened right before my eyes, where a single mother and her eldest daughter were shot while picking up firewood. They left four very young children behind, including a six-month-old baby. We managed to find them a good foster family.

What message do you want to share with UNHCR supporters?

The children should not be forgotten. If I had a chance, I would try and give them back part of their childhood. ■

»» HOW UNHCR IS HELPING UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN



Providing safe shelter, food and healthcare



Reuniting children with their families or finding foster carers



Obtaining birth certificates and identity cards



Lobbying governments to include displaced children in national child protection systems



Helping children return to school or gain vocational skills



Raising awareness of issues such as child labour and family violence



Supporting youth-led initiatives such as sports, recreation and peace-building programs

Innovation

AIMING HIGHER

Creativity

DAFI

Field visits

Success

Team work

Educate

Dr Michael Brownstein.



Australian doctor mentors Syrian refugee scholar

A Syrian refugee student has received a life-changing mentorship from an Australian doctor thanks to UNHCR’s innovative Connecting Worlds app.

Omar, a 24-year-old Syrian refugee living in Jordan, connected with Victorian GP Dr Michael Brownstein, or ‘Dr Mick’, to receive advice on his medical studies and career.

Omar fled to Jordan with his family in 2013. He managed to complete his secondary education in Amman before earning a DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship to study medicine at university. DAFI scholarships give refugee and returnee students the opportunity to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum or home country. Since 1992, the program has helped over 21,500 young refugees undertake tertiary studies.

As part of the DAFI program, scholars are matched with mentors through

the Connecting Worlds app, which enables participants to exchange text messages and photos. Mentors come from various professional backgrounds and share their knowledge, skills and experiences to help refugee scholars achieve their goals.

UNHCR connected Omar, who is now in the final year of his medical degree at the Hashemite University in Zarqa, with Dr Mick. When asked to participate in the Connecting Worlds mentoring program, Dr Mick knew it was an opportunity he couldn’t turn down.

“I was contacted about becoming a mentor and realised that, because I am a doctor, I might be able to connect with refugee medical students and that really touched me deeply. I feel it’s an opportunity to encourage



◀ Syrian refugee Omar is completing a medical degree in Jordan.

» UNHCR'S DAFI PROGRAM



- » UNHCR's DAFI program has supported more than **21,500 young refugees** in **56 countries** over its 30-year history.
- » **Six per cent of refugee youth are enrolled** in higher education, compared to 40 per cent of non-refugee youth worldwide.
- » UNHCR is committed to achieving **15 per cent refugee enrolment** in higher education by 2030.
- » There are currently **2,600 women in the program** and UNHCR aims for an **additional 5,050 women** to be enrolled by 2025.

somebody else to perform to their highest potential," he said.

During the three-month mentorship, the pair exchanged messages about Omar's studies, the medical profession and their own backgrounds. Omar also asked Dr Mick for guidance on his future.

"I told him my fears for the future, where I should go, what I should study... He kept reassuring me: 'Don't be stressed, don't put too much pressure on yourself, the future will unfold on its own,'" Omar said.

Dr Mick said he developed an understanding of the challenges that refugee students like Omar face.

"It really opened up the world to me, to see what my mentee Omar was going through as a medical student."

Omar is unsure of what he will do next, but is determined to use his skills to help other Syrians.

"I am so ambitious to be better and to help more people – especially in my country where there are so many morbidities and disabilities."

While Omar feels privileged to have received a DAFI scholarship, he believes there are many other refugees with just as much potential who have not been as fortunate.

"I am so grateful I have a chance to complete my learning. Not every Syrian refugee has the chance to be a DAFI student. I know someone who received very good grades but didn't get the chance."

For students like Omar, education is key to unlocking a brighter future.

However, the DAFI scholarship program is critically under-funded, limiting the number of scholarships on offer.

UNHCR's Aiming Higher initiative aims to increase the number of DAFI scholarships available for young refugees.

In recent years, refugee enrolment at tertiary level has increased from one to five per cent, however, UNHCR is striving to achieve 15 per cent enrolment by 2030. ■

To learn more about mentoring refugees through Connecting Worlds, please contact Aylin Salt on (02) 9276 6871 or ASalt@unrefugees.org.au

Twelve years on, Syria's crisis is unrelenting

Khadra, a 50-year-old Syrian refugee and widow living in Lebanon, is forced to search through garbage to find something to feed her family – usually rice and bulgur wheat. It's often rancid and infested with mites.

"I take it outside, under the sun, then I add salt. I go through it grain by grain. I pick out the worms and the pebbles. In the end, I cook it for my children."

Sometimes, if she's lucky, she can cook with the fat the butcher throws away. When she has a little money, she buys stale bread, softening it with water.

Khadra lives in an informal refugee settlement in northern Lebanon, sharing one room with her five sons, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. She currently owes three months' rent and lives in constant fear of eviction.

Every year, life gets harder for Khadra. Lebanon, which hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, is currently facing an economic

crisis. With prices skyrocketing, many refugee families are unable to afford the simplest foods, like rice and potatoes – in fact, 90 per cent rely on humanitarian aid to survive.

In 2022, UNHCR provided 1.2 million Syrian refugees with cash assistance. Unfortunately, the economic crisis means this assistance no longer stretches as far as it once did. Khadra spends all her cash on gas for cooking and struggles to cover her other expenses – rent, water, food, medicine. Adnan, her 15-year-old son, works long hours selling tissues on the street but only earns about \$3 per day.

While Lebanese communities are also struggling, they continue to show kindness and generosity to Syrian refugees. Khadra sometimes receives food and clothing from Lebanese locals.

"For me, it is not a matter of dignity anymore, it is a matter of survival," she said.

After 12 years of war, more than 12 million Syrians are displaced. Many are trapped in poverty and,

even if they could return home, have absolutely nothing left. The devastating earthquakes on 6 February only brought more suffering, both in Syria and in neighbouring Türkiye – the country that hosts the most Syrian refugees in the world.

"The impact continues to be very hard on communities that, we should not forget, have gone through years of conflict and hardship," said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, on a recent trip to Syria.

"UNHCR has stepped up very quickly with relief items that people needed, especially in the first few days after the earthquake. The international community has mobilised considerable assistance. That effort needs to be sustained."

With your support, UNHCR can provide safe shelter, emergency supplies and cash assistance to Syrians in need. ■

To send help to the people of Syria, please visit unrefugees.org.au/syria



© UNHCR/Joelle Abou Chabke

↑
Khadra eats with her daughter-in-law and grandchild in their home in northern Lebanon.



© UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf

Emergency relief items arrive at a mosque that is providing temporary shelter for earthquake survivors in Aleppo, Syria. ↓



◀
UNHCR distributes shelter materials to Syrian refugees in Lebanon so they can weather-proof their homes.

» HOW UNHCR IS HELPING



CASH: Cash assistance helps people cover everyday essentials – food, water, rent



AID ITEMS: Blankets, sleeping mats, jerry-cans, kitchen sets, solar lamps



SHELTER: Distributing tents, maintaining camp infrastructure, repairing shelters



LIVELIHOODS: Supporting agricultural livelihoods, restoring vocational training centres, helping people start small businesses



PROTECTION: Legal assistance, child protection, support for survivors of gender-based violence

Children in Paktika Province, Afghanistan.

Andrew Atkinson on assignment as a UN peacekeeper in Timor-Leste.

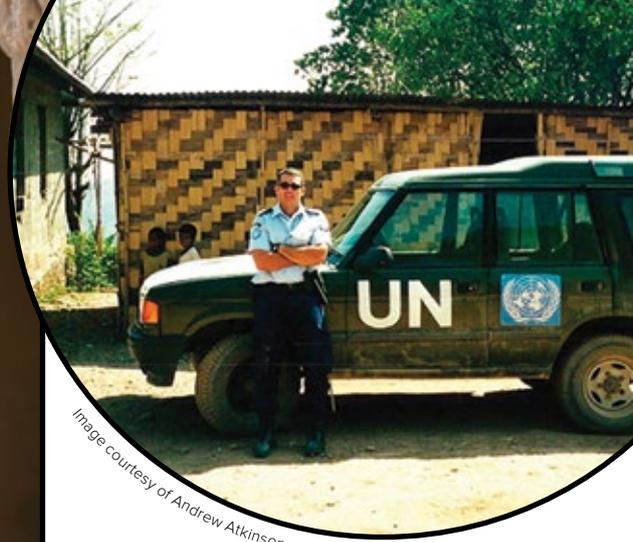


Image courtesy of Andrew Atkinson.

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Why a former UN peacekeeper is looking after refugees in his Will

While working as a UN peacekeeper in Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor) and Iraq, Andrew Atkinson witnessed UNHCR's impact first-hand. He explains why he decided to leave a gift to Australia for UNHCR in his Will.

You worked as a UN peacekeeper for four years. Can you tell us how you got involved and what the job was like?

I was a policeman for most of my life. I spent 28 years working with Victoria Police and had the opportunity to do secondments with the United Nations. Initially, I started in Timor-Leste, after the 1999 East Timorese crisis caused mass displacement across that region. My work involved reuniting displaced people after the conflict had occurred and assisting the local police in re-establishing their role in the region. A lot of the work we did as peacekeepers was alongside UNHCR.

I then got an opportunity to work in Iraq in 2004. They were vastly different working environments. My role in Iraq was much more about providing security for the United Nations in Baghdad.

What did you see when working directly with refugees or displaced people?

In Timor-Leste, the refugee villages were made entirely from tents, which acted as temporary housing. Sometimes displaced families would live there for months and months until they were relocated to villages within the mountains. You can imagine the harsh conditions these people faced, being in a tropical region. They endured constant, intense rain and stifling heat. It was incredibly confronting. For displaced people who are left with nothing, UNHCR is there to support them.

Why did you choose to leave a gift in your Will?

I think seeing the devastation first-hand throughout my career opened my eyes to what's actually going on in the world. It gave me a sense of compassion and concern. I contributed as much as I could in my career, but I'm no longer a peacekeeper, so I wanted to find another way to keep supporting UNHCR. I've seen the work that UNHCR does, and I feel that leaving a gift in my Will is just the right thing to do.

What would you say to someone considering leaving a gift in their Will?

There are many charities in the world that need help, but I believe the work that UNHCR does is extremely significant and important – it's invaluable.

In a lot of conflicts or disasters, there's nobody to help but UNHCR, and there'd be many, many lives lost if it wasn't for the work they do. I feel that it's the best option in terms of making a donation. I've seen the efforts they go to and know they certainly make a difference. A massive percentage of the donations goes to those in need. ■

How do you want to be remembered? One of the most inspiring ways to ensure your values live on is to leave a gift in your Will, like Andrew. To find out more, contact our Planned Giving Manager, Aylin Salt, on (02) 9276 6871 or ASalt@unrefugees.org.au