

Subscribe to bold journalism that helps you take action. Just \$3.46/week.





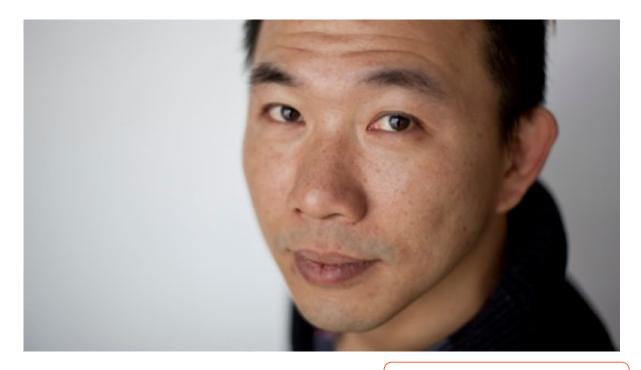


LOCAL CANADA POLITICS WORLD OPINION LIFE SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS STAR |

This copy is for your personal non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies of Toronto Star content for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, or inquire about permissions/licensing, please go to: www.TorontoStarReprints.com

GTA

# Toronto couple's wedding vows in of new life to refugee family



Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub



When Natasha Carew and Sean Ritchie got married last summer, they decided it was better to give than to receive.

The Toronto couple chose to forgo wedding gifts, and instead encouraged their guests to help raise \$26,000 to sponsor a refugee family and give them a new life in Canada.

After forming a core volunteer group of eight people, including the couple, Carew's mother, co-workers and friends, they were matched with a Sudanese family who had been stuck in limbo in Jordan for almost five years.

### ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW

Mohammed Abd Elnour, his wife Assgad Ali, and their two daughters, Rafaa, 9, and Ruba, 5, arrived in Toronto from Amman on June 4, just three months after they were matched with Carew's group.

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

opportunity we are afforded in Canada," said Carew, a litigation lawyer with Gowling WLG, who, along with her husband, asked guests at their August 2017 wedding to help with the humanitarian endeavour. "We could have been the ones sitting in a refugee camp looking to get an opportunity for a new life from somebody."

The quick arrival of a sponsored family is usually rare, but that's not the case under the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program, which matches travel-ready refugees with sponsors. The program, which started in 2012, splits the cost of settlement between private sponsors and the federal government.

"It's helpful the costs are shared," said Carew. "You cannot sponsor specific people, but this is quick and your (pre-screened) family can be here in a few months."

#### ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW

As of last month, the blended program's annual 1,500 targeted spots had not been filled. Meanwhile, private groups solely supporting their own selected refugees have already claimed the 18,000 spaces allocated this year by Ottawa and must now wait until next year for new spots. Ottawa does not allow unused capacity to carry over to the following year.

## YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN...



Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub



# I pretended to be a celeb at TIFF - here's what happened

mpt to



# Canadians are nice and polite. Maybe that's why it's so hard to make friends here

maximize Canada's

annual quota for the blended sponsorship program, the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub, the Shapiro Foundation and Jewish Family Services Ottawa created a special fund to fully subsidize the financial commitment of private sponsors participating in the blended resettlement program. Refugees sponsored with the support of this fund will arrive before Dec. 31.

"More than 1,000 BVOR cases are at risk in 2018 if we do not mobilize Canadian sponsors," said Jennifer Bond of the University of Ottawa. "The Refugee Hub is working with sponsors and other partners across Canada to bring as many vulnerable people to safety as we can before resettlement capacity is lost."

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub



With a Sept. 17 application deadline looming, organizers have so far received more than 700 inquiries but only about 100 formal expressions of interest involving fewer than 500 sponsored refugees — half of the target.

"At a time of record high global needs and diminishing resettlement opportunities for refugees, these thousand spaces are more precious than ever," said Ed Shapiro, trustee of the Shapiro Foundation. "It is critical to support sponsor groups who have served as a model for welcoming refugees and by unbundling their required financial obligations, we hope they will be able to increase their 2018 resettlement commitments."

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

Toronto couple's wedding vows included gift of new life to refugee family | The Star

blended program has had a tough time meeting its yearly targets because private groups are more keen on sponsoring family members of Syrian newcomers' still stuck overseas, said Yosief Araya of the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program.

## YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN...



'It feels like a dream': Syrian refugee family in tearful  $_{The\ one-time}$  reunion at Pearson



Did Saudi teen Rahaf Mohammed iump the queue

re practical

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

resources but not the money to support sponsored refugees," said Araya, whose organization is tasked by Ottawa with matching private groups with refugees ready for resettlement who have been referred by Canadian visa posts.

While sole private sponsors must raise at least \$13,500 for start-up costs such as furniture, phones and clothes, as well as a year of financial support for a single refugee, groups participating in the blended program need only \$9,900 as Ottawa will shoulder six months of the newcomer's income support.

Although the special subsidy wasn't available when Carew, 34, and Ritchie, 37, decided to sponsor a family, they jumped at the chance to help others.

Sick and tired of wedding consumerism, the couple decided to dedicate their big day to a fundraising and refugee sponsorship event. Not only did they ask their guests to donate, they also created an email network for support and raised additional cash through social media and work.

## Get more of today's top stories in your inbox

Sign up for the Star's Morning Headlines newsletter for a briefing of the day's big news.

Sign Up Now

Although supporting a family of four under a blended program would only require \$20,000 from a private group, the couple set a target of \$26,000 because it costs more to live in Toronto.

Carew, who typically works 12-hour days, said the commitment to a

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

guide the family through the initial settlement, including helping them apply for Canadian ID, enrolling the kids in school, using public transit and supporting them in day-to-day challenges.

"Some people were so negative about this process and thought it (would be) a massive undertaking that required full-time level commitment," said Carew. "I work crazy hours but everyone could do it."



**Nicholas Keung** is a Toronto-based reporter covering immigration. Follow him on Twitter: @nkeung

**SHARE:** 



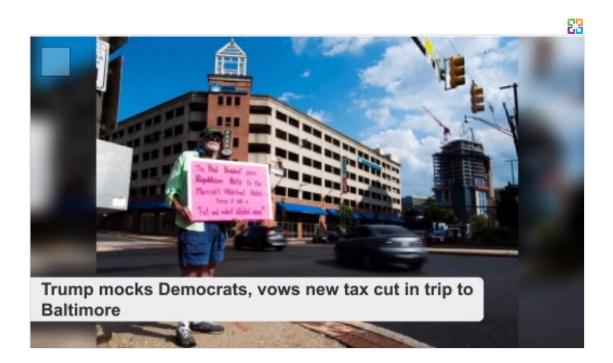












#### MORF NFWS

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub



Rosie DiManno: Cycling zealots wants us to turn the city upside down to fulfill their wishes

Illegal cannabis franchise reopens one of its locations	Illegal	cannabis	franchise	reopens	one of its	locations
---	---------	----------	-----------	---------	------------	-----------

For transgender Indians hoping to join police force, a dream is denied

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

Opioid crackdown forces pain patients to taper off drugs they say they need

Juanita Abernathy, civil rights icon, dies at 89



Johnson, Juncker to meet in Brexit breakthrough bid



## **TOP STORIES**

Five take-aways from eight days of hearings on Airbnb-style rentals

Mitch Marner and Maple Leafs reach six-year deal worth \$65.4 million



RCMP employee charged with stealing secrets



Hijabi Ballers inspire Raptors to sell branded sports hijab, the first of its kind in NBA



Ontario's deficit last year was \$7.4B - half what Ford claimed



Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub

Copyright owned or licensed by Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. Republication or distribution of this content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited and/or its licensors. To order copies of Toronto Star articles, please go to: www.TorontoStarReprints.com

## LOCAL GUIDE (HTTP://TORONTO.THESTAR.COM/)

(H)

FEATURED BUSINESSES RECENT ADS



## thestar.com

- Subscribe to the Star
- Manage Star Subscription
- Feedback
- Site Map
- Newsletters
- Homefinder.ca
- Corrections
- Today's News
- Flyers
- Insurance Hotline
- CanadaStays
- Contests

## Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.

- Subscribe to Home Delivery
- Manage Home Delivery Subscription
- About
- Torstar Journalistic Standards
- Atkinson Principles
- Glossary
- Trust Project
- Contact Us
- Contact Webmaster
- FAO
- News Releases
- Star Internships
- Careers @ the Star
- Star Advisers
- Star ePaper Edition
- Reprint and License

## Advertising

- · Advertise with Us
- Advertising Terms
- Special Features
- Election Ads Regis

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub









Privacy Policy Terms and Conditions

© Copyright Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. 1996 – 2019 The Toronto Star and thestar.com, each property of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited, One Yonge Street, 4th floor, T M5E 1E6

Subscribe to The Star for just \$3.46+tax/weekSub