

# 'If you're not giving, you're not living'

Ugandan-born philanthropist delivers lunch with love to Vancouver's homeless



Young volunteers help distribute lunches to Vancouver's homeless during Help Change My City Alliance's monthly Eats on the Streets day of giving. — PHOTOS: HELP CHANGE MY CITY ALLIANCE

## Mark Sissons

SPECIAL TO THE SUNDAY PROVINCE

Sometimes a sandwich and a smile can make all the difference.

That's the idea behind Eats on the Streets, the brainchild of Ugandan-born Vancouver resident Alpha Kirabira.

Kirabira is the founder of the Help Change My City Alliance, a registered charity that offers support, mentorship and skills training to the Lower Mainland's homeless, marginalized and at-risk youth.

Once a month, Kirabira and his partner Christine Michelle recruit young volunteers to help prepare hundreds of lunches and distribute them to the Downtown Eastside's homeless.

"Eats on the Streets is more than just about handing out free lunch," says Kirabira, who started the Help Change My City Alliance in 2012.

"It's a smile from a stranger, a word of encouragement and an opportunity to educate local youth about social responsibility. The goal is to ignite in youth the spirit of giving."

When he was 12, Kirabira was



ALPHA KIRABIRA

Kirabira's Ugandan enterprises now help fund his efforts to give back to Canada.

"My mother always told me that no matter how rich you are, you're not truly successful until you're giving back, completing the circle," he says.

"If you're not giving, you're not living."

On Jan. 29, volunteers will gather at the Art Institute of Vancouver on Renfrew Street to prepare sandwiches and messages of goodwill and support for Vancouver's homeless.

"Our students feel so proud and grateful to be giving their love, hard work and time helping others in need," says Art Institute president Brian Parker.

The next morning, more volunteers will distribute lunches from the West Hotel & Bar on Carrall Street.

"It's going to be a community event, with everyone from high school to kindergarten students participating," says Kirabira, adding that he hopes corporations will eventually get involved as sponsors.

For more information, visit [helpchangemycity.com](http://helpchangemycity.com) or email [helpchangemycity@gmail.com](mailto:helpchangemycity@gmail.com).