

## Retired sports gear can launch a career

By Vicki Woolley

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Unwanted gear could be the making of future athletes.

Fitness Locker coach Benjamin Eitelberg believes regular exercise plays a big part in our physical and mental wellbeing. So committed is he to this holistic view that four years ago he began organising an annual appeal for donations of sports gear.

The collected items – good-quality clothing, tracksuits and shoes, swimwear, bags and sporting equipment "are distributed to decile one schools in the Waikato area.

"I believe in reaching out to those less fortunate in any way that we can. This could provide the catalyst for a recipient to do something great they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to do," said Eitelberg.

"The first year we delivered this appeal we were humbled by how little these kids had and knew straight away that whatever we donated would go a very long way."

The gear drive is operated in conjunction with Project Energise, a Sport Waikato initiative started in 2005 to advance children's activity, nutrition and overall health in the Waikato region. Hamilton "energiser" Simon Beale said the impact it has in some areas cannot be underestimated.

"One child complained that the shoes we had given him were too tight. It turns out he had never worn shoes that fitted him properly before," said Beale.

The donated equipment is just one part of the initiative for Eitelberg. The Fitness Locker team facilitate a group of exercise sessions at each school as they deliver the collected items. Eitelberg hopes linking fitness with fun can influence the direction of some children's lives.

"One pair of shoes, an item of clothing or even a cricket bat could change the path of a child, whether it be in sport or just life in general. In addition to associating themselves with other inspiring people, it builds better confidence which in turn develops these kids into good people, with, hopefully, the occasional new sporting star, too," he said.

Crawshaw Primary and Te Kura O Waharoa in Hamilton will benefit from the appeal this year.



Ben Eitelberg and Erin Furness discuss fitness and fun with Huntly Primary School children.

### Sports gear appeal

**What:** Donations of good-quality sports apparel and equipment.

**When:** Friday, June 12.

**Where:** Auckland drop-off locations: Bodyneed Ponsonby Sports Clinic, Format Limited, FuelMe.

Hamilton drop-off locations: Bob's Bikes, Fastlane Fitness, Shoe Clinic, Swim T3.

For more information: [info@fitnesslocker.co.nz](mailto:info@fitnesslocker.co.nz)

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