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MEDIA RELEASE *for use with photo to be taken Monday 10 April 9.30am at Russell Roads*

## Buttabean boxer in town to knock out healthy message

For Dave Letele, aka Brown Buttabean, yesterday was a chance to pay back the support he has received from a Hawke's Bay local businessman, by sharing his motivational story.

Two years ago, Robbie Gale, owner of Russell Roads, started sponsoring Mr Letele's boxing prowess. However, it was the personal journey that saw the heavyweight boxer drop almost half his body weight and become an inspiration to others battling their weight and unhealthy lifestyles, that Mr Gale was touched by.

Mr Letele told the 70-plus Russell Road employees gathered for breakfast at a monthly meeting in Hastings, that there were times in life when things got tough but "the only way is up and anything is possible with hard work."

He shared his 'rags to riches to rags' story, telling how he has used his own weight loss, dropping 90kg off his 210kg max, to help others by supporting and educating everyday people on their health and wellness journey.

The initial sponsorship from Russell Roads had been a "godsend" initially as he had "only \$20 to my name", while the ongoing sponsorship had helped him achieve what he had over the past two years, Mr Letele told the group,

Those achievements include running boot camps that train up to 500 people weekly, diet programmes, support groups, fitness plans, undertaking community work, and making the occasional school visit.

In 2015, he launched a website and now has an app [www.buttbeanmotivation.co.nz](http://www.buttbeanmotivation.co.nz) that provides inspiration and guidance, while his free motivational Facebook group called Buttabean Motivation has 8000 members.

His work is starting to attract public funding, which is a necessity as most of his 'clients' are from struggling Pacific Island families where obesity is a problem, but income is low so payment is by gold coin koha. The exercise regime he promotes is based around using own body weight, "rather than fancy gym equipment".





Mr Letele has retired from professional boxing but still participates in charity exhibition matches that generally have better health organisations as the beneficiaries.

The son and nephew of former Mongrel Mob leaders, Mr Letele was separated from his New Zealand siblings and raised in Australia by his grandparents. Both men have since moved away from that lifestyle and helped form and work in the Grace Foundation, providing residential care and support for people recently released from prison, suffering mental illness, homeless or otherwise struggling to cope in society.

On returning to New Zealand to live with his father, Mr Letele showed promise as a rugby league player and played for New Zealand secondary and Maori teams but suffered debilitating knee injuries that saw him signed with but never playing for Manly in Australia.

After abandoning that sport, Mr Letele moved into the business world and after early success, acknowledges that he over stretched and lost his businesses, his family, and ultimately his health.

At this low point he reconnected with former Selwyn College classmate and friend, Dave Higgins, boss of boxing promoters Duco Events, who invited Mr Letele to the NRL Auckland Nines in 2014, then encouraged him to take stock of his life and stay in Auckland to rebuild it.

Mr Letele took up boxing and gradually began to drop weight and rebuild his fitness. At this point he adopted the professional persona of the Brown Buttabean. His fight appearances garnered headlines, he was in demand for charity causes, had 16,000 followers on his boxing Facebook page and 10,000 on Instagram.

During this period, Robbie and his wife Michelle became aware of Dave Letele and despite not having met, felt compelled to offer sponsorship, “more for the man than the boxer”, says Mr Gale.

The relationship has grown into a friendship that “has never really been about the boxing. We really felt that what Dave is doing for others through his own his determination was worthy of support.”

For Mr Letele, the work he is doing now and the satisfaction he gains from seeing others reclaim their fitness and health is the ‘riches’ he gains motivation from.

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