



**SNOOZING IS NOT CHOOSING:** Auckland-based counsellor, mentor, personal trainer and social justice advocate Richie Hardcore talks to Tauhara College students about the issue of consent.

PICTURE: LAURILEE McMICHAEL

# Learning about ensuring consent

By Laurilee McMichael

Consent, nude pictures, healthy relationships and catfishing — some new issues and others that demand a new approach — were all on the agenda in a no-holds-barred presentation last week.

Former kickboxer turned counsellor, presenter and personal trainer Richie Hardcore spoke twice in Taupō last week, once at Waiora House and again at Tauhara College later the same day.

Sexual violence in New Zealand is a serious issue and Richie, who is a White Ribbon Ambassador and on the board of Rape Prevention Education, travels the country talking to young people to raise awareness about consent, sex and healthy relationships.

At a full school assembly at Tauhara College, Richie told the students that despite living in an Instagram culture where it's all about selfies and body image, the basis of a healthy relationship was about being friends, being able to communicate, and being able to compromise.

"The other person has just as much right to be happy and healthy as you do."

That extended to people they met online. Richie warned of the dangers of catfishing, where people pretend to be someone they are not to lure someone else into a relationship, as well as sexting and sending inappropriate pictures — a problem in Taupō.

"I hear that 'dick pics' are a big problem down here," he said. "I don't know why you'd want to send your junk to a complete stranger but if you're a recipient of an unwanted sexual image it's really offensive, it's really aggressive and it really underlines that whole culture where sexual violence

becomes normal as you're imposing yourself on someone. There's no consent there . . . at the moment it seems that what's normal isn't actually what's good."

Warning that the topic of consent was "where it gets a little bit heavy", Richie discussed consent as something that can be given and also taken away as a person wished and showed a video about consent as it applied to a cup of tea.

"If you're able to understand when people don't want tea, then how hard is it to understand when they don't want sex? When it comes to tea or sex, consent is everything."

He told the students that because of his work promoting healthy relationships, people often get in touch to tell him their stories — and if bad things had happened to them, it was often when they were still at school.

"What happens to us now and what you can do to other people can affect you for the rest of your life. If someone doesn't want to do something or thinks they don't want to do something, then go with it."

He urged everyone, especially the young men, to think about, read about and talk about consent to try to help address New Zealand's problem with sexual violence.

"The only thing that's responsible for rape is rapists. It's not how drunk they were or how short their skirt was. So I want you guys to take that and have a conversation around it.

Richie said that despite an early career in kickboxing, he had always been interested in social justice issues.

"I'm not trying to speak for women but I'm trying to use my voice to speak to men and young people about issues that might not have been otherwise heard."

Taupō's Anamata Café's A Team fundraised to bring Ritchie to town.