

# Mel Thomas

## *Violence Expert, Speaker and Writer*

Moving beyond well-intentioned awareness campaigns into strong-hearted action Mel Thomas has positively impacted the lives of thousands of Australians with her disarming approach to tackling the issues of gender equality, bullying, street violence and family violence.

Mel is the Founder of KYUP! Project, an evidence-based self-worth and self defense movement on a mission to break the cycle of family and intimate partner violence at the grassroots.

Pronounced KEY-UP and named after a power cry in martial arts, the charity was established thanks to a Layne Beachley AO scholarship in 2013. Mel's innovative and effective approach to personal safety and life preservation techniques is based on her lived experience of having grown up with domestic violence and bullying (both as victim and instigator) and subsequent 20 years of specialist training in Hapkido, the Korean art of self defence. Mel was the Australian Champion, Hapkido Woman of the Year in 2005 and again in 2019, breaking barriers and demonstrating true commitment. Mel Thomas is an accomplished leader and is recognised as a trailblazer by the martial arts community at large. In 2023 Mel galvanised 50 black belt women from all martial arts disciplines and every corner of the country to join her growing army of all-female role models. With Mel at the helm, the women deliver trauma-informed domestic violence prevention education to some of the hardest hit communities by violence in Australia. Mel's brand of self-defence for women and children living with past and present violence has been delivered in partnership with NSW State Government, NSW Police, and PCYC since 2019.

In recent years, Mel has extended herself to advisory roles on domestic violence policy, training, and awareness and for corporates such as Scentre Group, APRA the ASX, Bendigo Bank, Mazzars, and Royal North Shore Hospital to name but a few. Her work with businesses has saved lives, supporting 1 in 6 women and 1 in 16 men to disclose and seek help in the workplace.

As a media commentator, Mel is balanced, passionate and authentic. Featured across radio, tv and print, her childhood violence Op Ed's in the SMH, Daily Telegraph and Mamamia has sparked unprecedented conversations for change and domestic violence policy across the NRL and AFL.

In March 2018, Mel was recognised as the Commonwealth Bank Australian of the Day and in the



same year, Mel was nominated for Australian of the Year.

Described as an enigmatic powerhouse by Business Chicks and the winner of Cosmopolitan Magazine Woman of the Year in 2018 for her unwavering advocacy for children born into the cycle of abuse.

As a survivor of childhood family violence and mother of 2 teenage girls, Mel's personal goal is to ensure all Australian children know their worth and champion their safety and well-being. She believes just like you don't need to be a lifesaver to stay safe on the beach, you don't need to be a black belt to live free from violence. Working directly with more than 20,000 kids face to face from the most remote indigenous communities to entire schools in metro areas and small shelters. 7 days a week, you can see Mel with her martial arts kit, empowering victims of all ages, races, backgrounds and ethnicity to take back their power and manage physical trauma triggers of choking, hair pulling, grabbing and sexual assault. Mel Thomas is a uniquely talented woman enabling our most vulnerable citizens to discover for themselves, they are stronger than they think.

### ***What Mel Talks About***

- education
- gender equality
- self worth and self defence
- domestic violence
- family violence
- personal safety
- women and leadership
- regional and remote communities and safety justice indigenous / at risk and marginalised groups
- martial arts / sporting achievements
- NGOs collaboration and partnerships

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