

HEALTH HERO

KRISTY HITCHENS, 42

Kicking up a storm for women who can't defend themselves, Kristy Hitchens came up with the idea of a Pink Belt Scholarship, so that women who are victims of domestic violence can get free training in self-defence, and the feeling of empowerment that comes with it.

I started taekwondo after watching my son, Lucas (now 11), train and just after turning the big 4-0. It was a family class, so there were other adults, but it was quite

daunting standing at the back like the Jolly Green Giant surrounded by all these little kids. But Lucas encouraged me, saying, "Go on, Mum, have a go. I'm so proud of you."

I found it was so therapeutic to punch and kick targets. And I was blown away by the fact you can get to 40 and discover a new thing that you completely love. I've experienced fitness and confidence as well as learning to defend myself. There's a lot of research around about the magical effect that martial arts has on women. **It's not just about knowing how to defend yourself, even though that's important, it's about developing a sense of empowerment.**

A friend of mine, who was training in taekwondo, was in a marriage

that turned violent. She had to leave the marriage last year and couldn't afford to train anymore. So the idea of this scholarship was inspired by her. Australian Taekwondo agreed to get behind the project and we've now got eight women training across Australia on scholarships, and we've now made this an annual event.

It goes to the wider benefits of training. When someone is empowered, they expect more from various aspects of their life – their health, their relationship, their career. So perhaps women will be less likely to enter into a relationship or a job where they feel compromised. **Find out more about the scholarships at chuffed.org/project/pinkbelt** **P**

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PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN GELLWEILER, AS TOLD TO ANDREA DUVAL