



The trailer for *Never Let Me Go*, a thriller starring Keira Knightley and Carey Mulligan. Based on the British-Japanese author Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, it sees a group of school children confronted with a disturbing reality as they reach adulthood

Summer projects

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Julie Meer and her interior designer, Zameer Abdul Wahab, look over the new centre plans. Lauren Lancaster / The National



Steve Watson discusses his screenplay progress with Magy Saeed. Paulo Vecina / The National



Jeanne LeSage took part in Original Fitness beach boot camp. Delores Johnson / The National



Murtuza Kaizar, centre, practises Arabic with his teacher, Yasser al Delli, right. Delores Johnson / The National

Missions complete

The eight weeks are up, during which time our four Summer Diary participants have been starting a business, writing a screenplay, getting fit and learning Arabic. Katie Boucher talks to them and their mentors about their results

Julie Meer

Julie is starting up Body Balancers, a wellness, sports and physiotherapy centre, in Jumeirah Lake Towers, Dubai.

We've had a lot of success in a short period of time. When I listen to other people's horror stories about opening a new business, I feel pretty lucky. There have been ups and downs but I've never felt like giving up. I think that's down to positive attitude and determination. If you have the dream and the passion to see it through you can succeed.

The most unexpected hurdle for me was the time it has taken for contracting and fit-out. The waiting period for people to get back to you; you're at their mercy. That put us back the most in terms of time frame. We're hoping to open at the end of September now.

As well as transforming my life, introducing the Dorn method (which deals with spinal misalignments) will hopefully change others' lives as well. And that's what it's all about.

When I think about opening on the first day, I feel scared, overwhelmed and on top of the world.

It's been a dream of mine for so many years and the fact that it's finally becoming reality is unbelievable.

www.bodybalancers.com

Julie's mentor, Shimi Shah, is a venture capitalist and director of Carousel Solutions, a consultancy service catering for small and medium-sized businesses.

Julie has made tremendous progress in a short space of time. She

has faced challenges, but her perseverance and determination have paid off.

She has been thinking beyond just company formation issues, and focusing on what happens when the doors open, how to get people interested and how best to network in order to generate interest.

Julie has also joined social media classes which I think is incredibly important for businesses going forward. It is no longer an option but a part of business to have a social media strategy. Now she needs to focus on the launch, to ensure that people come through the door. The website is going to be an important gateway for information. It is also important for Julie to focus on her financial forecasts.

She should anticipate a quiet Ramadan period, but also cater for a few months where take-up may be slower than expected.

Steve Watson

Steve used to work in media but has, since arriving in Abu Dhabi last August, been a house husband. He has written his first screenplay.

The whole exercise has been a huge learning curve. I've really enjoyed spending time with my mentor Magy and my friend Greg Unrau, at the Abu Dhabi Film Commission, in an industry I had previously had no exposure to. It's almost been like going back to school. To be able to take thoughts and observations and create a story around them has been fun.

I wouldn't say I'm proud of myself, but I am chuffed that I've been

able to complete the task. Being a sportsman, I am competitive by nature, and seeing the other three participants doing their challenges has helped me to stay focused and see it through in the time frame.

I would much rather have been doing the exercise programme, but this took me out of my comfort zone. When I left Australia, a couple of people said to me, "you should start a blog and talk about your adventures".

Doing this exercise and having a go at writing a story and then creating a screenplay out of it, I'm keen to have another go.

Now it's finished I'll miss it because it's given me the discipline to use my experiences in a constructive way.

I think my story can give people an insight into cultural alignments in foreign lands and how people feel about life as an expat.

Steve's mentor, Magy Saeed, is director of talent development at Katarat Ebda'a, a production company in Dubai that produces corporate videos and runs production workshops for young people.

I have seen Steve make a lot of progress in the past few weeks. He was able not only to write a story, but change it into a script. He was also able to grasp the concept of pacing things in order to attract the audience's attention rather than letting them get bored with a long introduction.

It is normal for anyone during their first attempt to struggle with this concept. Steve was able to overcome the obstacle most writers may face, which is believing that one picture is worth 1000 words.

He was passionate about a certain topic and that was a great starting point. Now, after some editing, I think his screenplay is very good, better than many that I have read.

Jeanne LeSage

Jeanne is managing producer of the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. She is doing Original Fitness's beach boot camp.

Being outside on the beach three times a week for the past eight weeks means there is now sand everywhere - in my apartment, in my car, in my shoes, in my hair. On the upside I have surprised myself by surpassing my expectations about my physical limits.

I'm a very persistent person, but I was surprised that I also proved to be so when it came to boot camp. The results and the achievement are far more than I thought they would be. I've lost weight, gone down a clothing size and am getting lots of comments about how I look now.

Now it just feels normal waking up at 5am and being home again by the time I would normally wake up.

I have loved being with a great group of people. We may not be friends for life but when you're out there and it's tough, it's great to have their support. The coaches have also been great; they've pushed me past my comfort zone, but were encouraging all the way.

I've just signed up for another month, and am hoping to keep going for as long as I can.

It's completely shifted my routine. It doesn't seem like a chore at all now. It just seems part of who I

am. You could say it has been transformative.

Jeanne's mentor, Philip Perrin, is boot camp group fitness co-ordinator at the Original Fitness Company.

Jeanne has done brilliantly. She's an inspiration to a lot of other people there because she never stops, and it's commendable. I've got youngsters there and people who look fitter than she is and they look up to her.

Her fitness has improved vastly. She's running a lot better than she did before, and her strength has come up. I think she's seen results physically too.

When she first came along I thought she was an ideal candidate for boot camp but she's surprised me with her determination. She's a bulldog; she never gives up.

And now she's staying at boot camp for the long run. If we touched base again in three months time you would see the same person but in a different body.

Murtuza Kaizar

Murtuza is branch manager of Hafele, a German company that supplies the construction industry with door hardware. He has been studying level three Arabic at Berlitz language school in Abu Dhabi.

Being so busy for the past six months has meant that my social life has taken a back seat.

Because I was also frustrated at the lack of opportunities to practise my Arabic, this week I came up with an idea to combine the two: a social networking portal where people who are

learning Arabic can meet up.

I want to help people like me to get over this language barrier. It goes without saying that I'm happy with my progress. Instead of the short phrases I started off with I can now make proper sentences using more than two words.

Some people think that it should be an inborn talent to learn a language, but you have to work at it. I have had moments of frustration but they have only made me more determined.

The next levels will give me even more of an opportunity to expand the language myself rather than just attending the institute. They've given me the walking stick; now I have to do the walking myself.

www.meetup.com/Arabic-Language-Lovers-UAE

Murtuza's mentor, Yasser al Delli, is an Arabic instructor at Berlitz Language School in Abu Dhabi.

Murtuza is a great student and quite motivated. In the past month, he has shown excellent progress in terms of his fluency and response rate outside of the classroom.

Murtuza initially had very limited knowledge and vocabulary, but with persistence and support he was able to build his bank of knowledge considerably.

Being keen on implementing what he learns in the classroom in external settings has gradually enriched his grasp of the language as well as his confidence when talking with native speakers.

I am glad that Murtuza is now confident using the language anytime and anywhere in both formal and informal situations.