

Studio Spotlight Q & A – Barefoot Studio Cowbridge, United Kingdom

For Pilates professionals looking for a well-structured business model to follow there are few people more qualified to provide that guidance than Peak Pilates® Master Instructor (MI) and Barefoot Studio's co-founder, Karen Ingram.

Karen discovered Pilates after going through a trying time in which she had back surgery, only to have her pain temporarily relieved and the underlying problem unaddressed. That experience gave her a passion for Pilates that has carried over professionally, giving her the drive to build a business model that provides for its members and produces profitable results – a win-win.



After finding success through the practice Karen published a book highlighting the key components that led to her success. Read on to get a small sample of how *Barefoot Studio* has found great success practicing Pilates in the UK:

Q: Please share your journey as you transitioned from an instructor to a studio owner. What were some of the more valuable experiences other Pilates professionals can learn from?

A: I qualified as a Pilates Instructor in 2002 and we opened *Barefoot Studio* in 2005. At that time, I had a space in my home and hired village halls for group mat classes. A couple of years working that way meant that I had a solid client base to bring with me when I took the plunge and made the commitment to [investing in my own] premises.

The building we rented for *Barefoot Studio* had three upstairs rooms that we didn't really need with our original business model so, we decided to turn them into treatment rooms and sublet them to therapists. This actually ended up being a key part of our business model. Our new premises – which we moved to three years ago – has four treatment rooms and the rental income from these pretty much covers our rent and rates. We also get great cross referrals from our therapist's clients to Pilates classes.

Q: Tell us about the history of Barefoot Studio and how you got started?

A: Paula Wooding and I co-founded Barefoot Studio in 2005. We are a Pilates Studio, Wellness Center and Activewear Store just outside Cowbridge, about 15 miles West of Cardiff in the UK.

Our philosophy is simple, to bring everything together under one roof to help you enjoy an active lifestyle. We believe that movement should be free from pain and, above all, joyful.



Q: What is Barefoot Studio's "secret sauce" that keeps your customers coming back?

A: Barefoot Studio is a family. We welcome everyone to the studio, any age, any fitness level, any size, anybody. The biggest compliment anyone ever paid me was when they said: "Barefoot Studio feels like my second home." We've woven lots of small things into the way we run the business that people may not notice individually, however together it creates that magic spark.

We have a wood burner in the reception area, that's lit throughout the winter. A chill out area with tea and coffee available. This encourages people to stick around after class, get to know each other and connect more. We have full-time reception staff who know all our customers by name. We have a wonderful and diverse staff team and a team of therapists who make Barefoot Studio a joyful place.

Q: How many Peak Pilates certified teachers do you have at

Barefoot Studio? How many have you brought through the program total?

A: Including myself, there are five Peak Pilates® certified teachers at Barefoot Studio who have trained 18 PPC1 students over the last couple of years, plus Mve Chair and PPC2. Next year I will be offering PPC3.

Q: What separates the Peak Pilates education program from other Pilates educational programs?

A: I have trained with many different Pilates educators. For me, the Peak Pilates® difference is how we coach, mentor and equip our students actually to teach. People leave our courses with a set of skills that enable them to cue effectively, touch, progress people effectively and a real depth of understanding of why we do what we do. We set new teachers up for success so that they can teach great classes that get results for their students. I don't know any other school of Pilates that does this.



Q: What is your favorite class to teach from the Peak

Pilates® program?

A: I love to teach private sessions. To see how people progress is so rewarding. I specialize in lower back pain and have worked with people who start off terrified to move and in pain. Building trust with them and teaching them how to enjoy moving again is a joy. There is nothing like working with someone, who at the start struggles with basic daily tasks, back doing something they love like gardening.

Q: What is the most Popular Pilates class your studio offers?

A: We have a 55-minute mat class that consists of 30 minutes of classical mat, followed by 25 minutes of weight training using a foam roller and hand weights. This is always fully booked. We have over 30 mat classes a week, and mat class is still our biggest earner, it's affordable and gets results.

Q: For someone looking to get their first Pilates certification, what advice would you give them?

A: If they are in the UK, I would ask them to look at our new Level Three Diploma in Pilates which is accredited by REPs and CIMSPA. It's based on the Peak Pilates PPC1 and delivered in partnership with YMCA Awards. It equips a new teacher with a comprehensive qualification backed up with industry recognized anatomy and theory for a solid start to any Pilates career.



Q: What separates Peak Pilates equipment from other Pilates equipment (quality, aesthetics, etc.)?

A: We have all Peak equipment in our studio. We have three [PPS Deluxe Reformers](#), and I love the versatility of their unique design. We have two studio spaces, and when I run a teacher training course, we can fold up and roll the reformers into the mat studio so that my course doesn't stop our regular sessions. The wooden barrels and chairs just look beautiful. Being an education center, our equipment gets well used and its durable and long lasting.

Q: How does your book *Thrive, Don't Just Survive* help provide fitness professionals looking to open a Pilates studio with a blueprint for success?



A: My book is based on my journey and experience of setting up and running Barefoot Studio. It teaches you how to combine your talent and passion for what you do with simple and effective business tools to make being in business a joy. I outline some of the common pitfalls that fitness professionals fall prey to when starting a business and then take you through five clear steps to get your business healthy, happy and thriving.

Q: You mentioned that Men's Pilates is one of your favorite classes to teach. What about this class makes it so fun and how can other businesses benefit from adding it to their program?

A: I was asked a number of years ago if we would run a men's Pilates class for the husband of one of our regulars and his mates. None of them would come to a mixed class, and they thought "Pilates was for girls." It's been fun proving them wrong!! It's a really sociable class, they all go to the pub afterward, and client retention has always been high in the group. They are really willing to have a go at anything and never worry about making a fool of themselves. They giggle a lot in class, especially when we use props and I mention something like "squeezing your ball"!

Interested in learning more about Karen's business model and advice? Purchase a digital copy of her book, "Thrive Don't Just Survive," for the promotional price of just 99 cents. Two-day launch promotion runs 27th and 28th April. Also available as a paperback.

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This article was contributed by James Gardikas, Digital Content Manager – Mad Dogg Athletics.