Dr. Kasie Whitener (00:02):

All right, welcome into the program. This is the initial broadcast of our Darla Moore School of Business podcast. We're as yet unnamed, we're sort of running it on the fly, which is super awesome because today's topic is actually entrepreneurship. And what we have today is two young entrepreneurs who are semifinalists in our Proving Ground contest that's coming up at the end of the month. My name is Dr. Kasie Whitener. I'm a professor of management and entrepreneurship at the Moore School of Business. And with me in the studio are Lucas Sevathian, who is one of our students who's come on exchange through the International Business program, and Jacob Shriver, Jake Shriver, who is one of our seniors in the management department. And we're gonna talk today a little bit about their proving ground experience, learn a little bit about their new ventures. We're gonna learn about pitch competitions in general and what they offer in terms of advantages as far as advancing your new venture. And then we're gonna learn, I don't know, a little bit about the Moore School in general and the entrepreneurship program therein. So let's start with you, Jake. Tell us a little bit about your project and getting into Proving Ground and what it means to be a semi-finalist.

Jake Shriver ([01:01](#)):

Yeah, of course, Dr. Whitener. So, um, being at the Moore School was one of the best decisions I ever made. Being born and raised in South Carolina, I really was looking for, um, something in business. And I knew that they had the number one, um, international business school. And that really piqued my interest. So, um, when I was a sophomore, I believe that's when I heard about the entrepreneurship concentration. And I just dove right in and it was right up my alley. My dad's an entrepreneur and I just wanted, you know, to learn from some of the professors that have had entrepreneurship experience. So, um, we actually, uh, were at, Kasie had the management 473 class Developing and Launching New Ventures, and there was a prompt about mental health. And, um, our group was really adamant about it. Um, and we decided that, you know, we'd, we'd go ahead and, you know, create an application that kind of acts as a stepping stone for parents and their children. Um, and it's been a really, really awesome journey so far. Um, and I'm just happy to be at the Moore School. But yeah,

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([02:02](#)):

I'm excited about this because you and I did meet in that 473 class, and the initial idea of 473 Developing and Launching New Ventures is that we should spend time working on a specific project over the course of the semester. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And what I gave you guys was what I called impact groups, which is like, let's think about people that you'd like to have an impact on. And then everybody signed up for the groups related to the people that they wanted to impact. And in this case, it was young kids. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> little kids. Yep. And so then we talked a lot about gamifying mental health in terms of trying to help them feel good about expressing themselves and bringing their emotions forward, and yet also want to participate in that activity. Exactly. Exactly. So it didn't feel like a slog of therapy. So we're gonna get more into this is a Aware Adventures Yes. That y'all built in a 473 class, took it through that Management 479 class. Yeah. And now this is the second pitch competition you've been in with Aware Adventures.

Jake Shriver ([02:50](#)):

We actually went into, um, SC Innovates last year when, um, the Growth Summit was happening. And we had an awesome experience there. There was, I, I think, um, three judges that graded us very well. Um, we made it to, I believe, um, it was like the seventh or sixth, uh, out of, I think there was 126 submissions or something like that. So I was really happy about it. But, you know, we didn't win any

prize money. That's what, you know, has given me more grit to really move into Proving Ground and, um, see what happens. So

Dr. Kasie Whitener (03:20):

Yeah, so SC Innovates, South Carolina Innovates is a competition that's sponsored by the South Carolina Department of Commerce and it brings all the universities in the state together to participate in this. So it was a statewide pitch competition. Really exciting stuff. We'll come back to it a little bit later in the program. So Lucas Sevathian, and you came to us from France. Exactly. You're an exchange student for just a year while you're here. And while you're here, dove headfirst into entrepreneurship and brought your company Peak Tew with you. So tell us a little bit about that.

Lucas Sevathian (03:46):

Exactly. So thank you, Dr. Whitener. So, um, as you said, I'm a French, uh, business student from the AEC Business School. I came in the a IL court program, which is something, uh, I assume, uh, Darla is a bit famous now for, um, I indeed, I came with a Peak Tew that I created back in January, 2023 with, uh, a team of now 15 people on board with me, international people, international students. And, uh, I decided to basically reach out to the Faber Institute of Entrepreneurship as well as the McNair Institute of Entrepreneurism at USC to basically support this project and take it to another step because like through the past year, I basically got a lot of, uh, understanding of what is business, what is entrepreneurship to another scale. Um, 'cause in my case, I started entrepreneurship when I was 12. So I had a bit of understanding of how to manage a venture before, but let's say that Peak Tew took me to a new, uh, standard. And now being able to be at proving ground and to be able to compete actively and show our work became something like a motivation for me and my team on the daily.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (04:54):

That's really exciting. You mentioned a couple of things there, so I wanna unpack 'em a little bit for our listeners. So you mentioned first the Faber Center. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. The Faber Center for Entrepreneurship is inside the business school. So it's inside the Darla Moore School of Business, and it's run by Dr. Savage and myself and Dr. Graybeal. So the three of us together are operating inside the Favor center. Um, we're joined by Joel Stevenson, who I think you guys might at least have one class with <laugh>. I don't.

Jake Shriver (05:19):

I have one or two classes, he's the best,

Dr. Kasie Whitener (05:20):

One or two, two classes with Stevenson. And, uh, Joel's our assistant director. He's been around for a while. He's one of our fundraisers. He's a fantastic guy. He definitely the OG as far as entrepreneurship at the Darla Moore School is concerned. So then there's Savage and Graybealand myself who are picking up the, uh, the, the rest of that, um, Faber Center opportunity. And then you also mentioned the McNair Institute. The McNair Institute is the Campus-wide minor. So we see the McNair Institute existing in all the different schools, not just the business school. And we work very closely with them. That's Dirk Brown and his team. Uh, and I'm glad that you've been able to interact with both groups because we do have a lot to offer as far as entrepreneurship on campus at the University of South Carolina. Alright, so let's start with Jake. Tell us about Aware Adventures. What is this app? Who is it for? How does it work?

Jake Shriver ():

Yeah. So Aware Adventures is an application that is going to help children ages normally three to 12, um, better understand their emotions and regulate their emotions. So, um, you know, people need to understand how to regulate their emotions. And if we're able to attack this at a young age, it's going to help children, um, you know, communicate better and strive to just understand and be more intelligent. So what the app actually does is it runs through different simulations and scenarios based on questions that the children answer. So let's say we have a 4-year-old and the application says, how was your day? And they answer, I was sad, or I was happy. We're able to stem from that and have some sort of simulation with the mascot and their avatar. They can show them the good things that they could do to make themselves feel better. Um, it could also prompt them to go outside as long as the parent says it's okay. Um, but really what we're trying to do is just, you know, have parents have a tool to monitor their child's responses. And, um, that's, that's the basic premise of Aware Adventures. It's gamifying that, that mental health and emotional aspect.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ():

And we know these kids are getting access to screens anyway. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so in this way it would be the parents queuing up the app, or the kid queuing up the app wanting to interact their avatar with the mascot Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and do these kind of fun games and simulations and that kind of thing. Meanwhile, responding to these prompt questions that provides data about the kids' experience.

Jake Shriver ():

Exactly. Yeah. So the data aspect's a whole nother different point. You know, whether the parents want to use this data to, you know, go to somebody in counseling, um, or, you know, therapeutical studies. It, it's very important to, you know, look at these points, um, because, you know, it's, it's a very large part of, you know, analysis is how are children thinking, um, their response points. And it can be helpful to a lot of different businesses.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ():

I'm excited about the opportunity for the data collection, mostly for researchers who want to be able to have access to these kinds of data sets. It's very complicated to get access to data sets and to get permissions and that sort of thing. And so if Aware Adventures can provide that kind of capture in a gamified experience that people are voluntarily being part of. And then of course the parents willingly and knowingly are saying, yes, they can use my child's data as aggregated data, not as my specific individual kid. Right. But as aggregated data for, for research, I think this could be really valuable.

Jake Shriver ():

A hundred percent. And, uh, another big thing is, you know, applications that have to do with mental health, most of the times it's kind of hard for parents to convert. You know, at first they'll be like, oh, this can help my child. But then, you know, a month or two goes by, are they still gonna pay that subscription? So that's one thing that we've been, you know, working on, is developing a way to make sure that we can see improvement in that child. Um, you know, a way to kind of monitor like, Hey, this is what happened on day one. This is what happened on day 20. So that's in the mix right now as well.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ():

In terms of being able to see patterns of behavior and seeing, you know, after, say for example, the, it's on Tuesdays that this kid has a really hard time Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And then come to find out their school schedule includes like multiplication table tests every Tuesday. It's like, okay, clearly this kid's having a hard time because he's got this repeating, you know, experience that happens every single week. And that's prompted. So just trying to give the parents data that the kids might not necessarily be giving them themselves.

Jake Shriver (09:22):

Exactly. And, uh, one more point I'd like to add on is, um, you know, we don't want children to be on the screens a lot. So obviously fighting with fires, not fighting fire, with fires not what we're trying to do here. So we only wanna limit the child to about like 10 to 15 minutes, or like one or two prompts a day.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (09:37):

And you mentioned one of the prompts about going outside, of course, with the parents' permission. Yeah. So I wanna come back to that because I think Peak Tew has a little bit to do with that too. So the Peak Tew app now transitioning to Lucas is about social experiences and individuals, but your target on's a little bit older. In this case, you're looking for people, I think between 18 and 27. Right. Okay. Tell us a little bit about Peak Tew and how it works.

Lucas Sevathian (09:59):

Um, well exactly. We can bump on the, the a similar concept because, uh, when you think about it, a lot of people nowadays are on social networks and on their phone. And we actually even lose the notion of time of how much time we spend on it. So our goal, our motivation was basically to create a concept that instead of making people assertive to, uh, current apps, to current social networks, to actually empowering them by using technology to providing them opportunities to live a better life, let's say it that way. So we basically divided on third three, uh, main access, which is people, places, and events. And, and the goal is to, uh, basically empower people, uh, in real time and real proximity with, uh, the things happening near by them. So to make it very simple, if you're walking on the street, you're going to be able to know exactly the people next to you, the place or the events next to you. And the goal with that is that you don't actually need to be on the app or text or swipe or whatever can other concept, but you actually go talk to the person again. And that's a whole new emphasis is based on reducing current addiction, current social network drawbacks, and actually living just a more simple life.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (11:14):

So Peak Tew creates a soft introduction Yes. For an actual physical proximity interaction where people are face to face in the same place. And the Peak Tew app queues up this conversation by saying like, Hey, you're here and this other person who's on the app is here. You all should have a conversation together with one another. Do you think that soft introduction is going to encourage more people to interact with, I mean, pseudo strangers?

Lucas Sevathian (11:41):

Um, we conducted various market research to actually get to know that. And we know that depending on the context, some people will be more likely to go talk to another person, uh, depending on, uh, for instance, if they're in holidays or like traveling or just if they have a specific purpose. But the goal is really by providing these opportunities to make sure that if you really wanna make this step, you can make it otherwise no one is forcing you to do it. But you have to keep in mind that the other person can

actually come talk to you, which is actually similar to real life. Sometime you don't expect someone to come talk to you, but that person ends up doing that, and that's how you end up having the best encounters in your life. Like many of my best friends, for instance, I met them the most craziest matter. So I just wanna make sure that now I can actually increase the number of opportunities I have on the matter.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([12:26](#)):

My first friend in college I met because I was wearing a Van Halen Balance tour, t-shirt <laugh>, and he was standing behind me in registration line. He was like, did you see them on the Balance tour? And I was like, I totally did. He is like, me too. And we had a whole conversation about it, and we're still friends to this day, like 25 years later. So there you go. Yeah. I mean, sometimes it is just kind of finding something that you have in common and we're a little bit less likely. I say we, but you guys in your generation, a little bit less likely to approach a stranger, even if you see something that maybe you have in common that's either on their T-shirt or on their backpack or something like that, it might, you might not feel as encouraged. And Peak Tew just kind of gives a little bit more, uh, confidence right. In that initial interaction.

Lucas Sevathian ([13:04](#)):

Uh, right. And on that matter specifically, we know that, uh, again, through interviews we conducted, uh, many people are disclosing the fact that true social networks, they have some dreams they wanna accomplish. It can be very simple dreams such as like meeting a new friend and playing volleyball on the beach. But the thing is they feel like their friendship online is not really as meaningful as in real life. And they might not actually be able to count on the same same person that's liking their pictures. Right. And so based on that, they really feel powerless. They feel like they don't have the same chances than they used to when they were younger. One of the main threat of Gen Z is actually nostalgia when you think about it. A lot of them are really back in the days, they're like, when you're looking at the comments on many publication, they're like, I'm scrolling, I'm sad. I'm trying to find a good, like, like picture reminding me a good song or something. Right. And so like our idea is just like, try to not be sad and try to evolve with time, but like by that distance yourself from the things they're making you sad.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([14:04](#)):

So what's interesting, because I wanna kind of like bridge this too with the Aware Adventures is you guys are kids that didn't necessarily grow up with the screen in your face. Yeah. But then as you got into teenagers and, and now, uh, young men in college, right. In your twenties, the screens are ever present. Right. And so some of the people in your generation do have that nostalgia for when they were 6, 7, 8 years old and you just met a kid on the playground and played with them. Right. Okay. So in Gen X, that went all the way up to like, when we were in our thirties. Right. <laugh>. So like we were still just bumping into people in bars and having conversations with them. Right. Um, but for you guys, like there, it seems like your generation over time has become more screen dependent, but what Peak Tew is going to do is try to give you the confidence to go back to that, like meeting people sort of spontaneously, although taking some of the risk factor out of it because you know that that person has some commonalities well before you've ever had a conversation with them.

Lucas Sevathian ([15:00](#)):

Exactly and, um, on that point, I can specifically also mention, um, one of my marketing teacher actually told me that, that there's many green, uh, initiatives that people want to do, for instance. But the thing

is they end up not doing it because they don't see how they can actually implement it in their real life. So the goal of Peak Tew is not to change the word in a one day thing, but actually to show that you can actually do the same thing even maybe in a better manner. Socializing, I'm talking about that, uh, through the app. And so therefore you will see that you don't even need that much other social network. And the, so basically in the space of a couple of years, you will be actually able to change your lifestyle. So it's a kind of learning curve that's gonna happen and shifting and also paving the way for new social network.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([15:45](#)):

Good. So I like this because it's talking about not keeping people forever as users of the Peak Tew app instead being a little bit of a confidence booster. And this takes me back to Aware Adventures because now you're talking about kids who are growing up with a screen in their face, a 4-year-old, a 5-year-old who that that is the default is that they've just got this screen that they're depending upon for entertainment, for engagement. And you mentioned too, like once the kid starts to understand these are my emotions and this is how I can express them, they may not be a full-time all the time forever user of Aware Adventures. Exactly. Yeah. You both are building these apps that are trying to create better social environments for the users, even though you'll get paid by the users being on the app, which I think is really an interesting piece because we see so much tech that's built to keep people addicted, to keep their screen in front of their face. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But both of you're expressing this feeling like, I don't want these people to be full-time forever users of my app. I want them to use it to get back to a lifestyle that has more, um, health and and emotional, uh, wellbeing to it. Yeah. Let's talk about do that aware, talk about Aware Adventures and these kids with the apps really early.

Jake Shriver ([16:51](#)):

Yeah. So it's, you know, it's crazy. I mean, there's nothing we can do about technology. It's only gonna continue to grow. Um, and when we see these, these children that, you know, are just, you know, watching CoComel and on their, on their iPads and just, you know, doing all this stuff all the time, you know, it's sad, but it's reality. Parents are always working. Um, you know, they don't have a lot of time for their kids and when their kids aren't distracted, they're going to become a problem. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, you know, the big thing is, you know, we don't see a lot of games like this in the market. We might see a couple of ones that have just failed and just never really, you know, stick. But I think that there's a extreme amount of possibilities if, you know, we're able to collaborate, you know, and partner with schools, counselors, there's endless opportunities. Um, but the big thing is, you know, limiting that screen time is going to, you know, save us because these generations of children, we don't know how how much excess technology can really affect their brain patterns, their neuro, their neurologic, um, dependencies, ex et cetera. Um, there's lots of studies that are being done right now that, you know, have given us basically nothing. Um, so time will tell. And I think that we do need a tool like this, um, Aware Adventures to seriously help parents and, and the children just become, you know, more intelligent and communicate, uh, better. That's just, yeah.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([18:14](#)):

Yeah. So when we were, I think in the eighties when we were growing up, it was TV's gonna rot your brain, like limit the amount of time that the kids are watching tv. And then certainly with the millennial generation, it was a lot of YouTube and other sort of social media. There was more internet, more access, still a ton of tv Right. But a lot of just sort of screen time in terms of being mindlessly entertained, not requiring that the kid interact in any way. That was what always, I think it's that sort of one-sided things being pushed at you instead of you interacting with that material and, and going back

and forth. Whereas like the three of us are in a room, we can look each other in the face and nods and go, yeah, yeah, I'm, I'm in on that. But like, if you're all on a screen and you don't necessarily have the ability to read facial expressions, you don't have the ability to read body language. Like all of those are skills that you develop in face-to-face conversation. And we're limiting how much of that kids are getting right now when they're getting so much screen time. So if we think about the ability for Peak Tew and, uh, Aware Adventures to monetize, where does the money come from? Let's start with peak two. So are we talking about individuals paying subscription rates? Are we talking about advertisers? Like where's the money gonna come from to fund an adventure? Like, uh, or fund a venture like Peak Tew?

Lucas Sevathian ([19:30](#)):

Right. So on that point, I just need to make a quick point of introduction to say that in my opinion, the new kind of generation of startups should be more socially responsible. And by that I mean that they should do good for the people, a kind of 50/50. You do good for the people, and the people are giving you back money in exchange and allowing you to survive, which was not the mindset that the previous companies had. Right. And when we talk about addiction such as TV addiction back in the days now phone addiction, we can also refer to, for instance, cigarettes where companies like did a lot of marketing to make our society addicted to it. So I think that the, the companies are playing a big role in that equation and that they, uh, they business model and they survival depends on how much the people are loyal to them And so to answer about the business model, our mindset is that we actually don't wanna basically use, uh, people's retention. So it's more B2B oriented, um, one of the first, there's three main ways where you're gonna make money. The first one is basically advertising in the notification box where you're gonna receive the various profiles of places nearby you and people. Um, then the second one is, um, for the professionals, like let's say small restaurants, bars and so on, they will basically have a free version and a premium version for like $15 a month. And with this version, they're going to be able to reach out to a broader audience. So wider audience. So instead of reaching out to 150 feet, they might do a 350 feet, uh, 300 feet. So that will increase actually the range. And, uh, this will actually allocate a good and efficient, and actually very not costly actually, uh, manner for businesses to advertise to their proximity. And so the third one is actually for big corporation, let's say Coca-Cola, they're going to, uh, try to interact with the community to promote the new product or to just get some community engagement. So they will basically host an event in real life, let's say on the main street or something. And by paying us, we will be a bit organizing, but mostly advertising for the people to get to this event. So by doing that, corporation can at the same time gain new customer, but also retain existing customers.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([21:40](#)):

So you're building Peak Tew to create a community. And then the community is what monetizes, right. 'cause access to that community is what advertisers are gonna wanna pay for. Right. And this is a basic model. We've seen it with newspapers, we've seen it with, uh, podcasts like radio. All the things are saying, we built this audience based on the quality of the product we've given them. They like being in our product, they like interacting with our app. And now our advertisers have access to that audience in particular ways and paid ways. And do you think the users need to know ahead of time, Hey, by the way, the advertisers are coming. Eventually they're going, because you mentioned in one of our previous conversations, one of the advantages of being in the Peak Tew app would be that as you're walking by different restaurants or you're walking by different retailers, you're being alerted that, Hey, there's a sale going on here. So it's a little bit like those sandwich boards that sit on the sidewalk out in front. But you might miss that. But now you're gonna get a ping on your phone that says, did you know they've got

two for one? You know, whatever. Buy a bucket, get a bucket over here at the, um, at the oyster bar, or whatever it is.

Lucas Sevathian ([22:43](#)):

Exactly. So in on, on that sense, the real strength compared to TV or newspaper that could still have a specific target market. Ours were really talking about the persons next to your business. So the kind of, it's like if you were having a pop about and you click on it and you're directly on the cart, it's very quick and very efficient manner for businesses in a also very user friendly manner. Like, I wouldn't feel like push to consume. I would be more like, I wanna actually try, that's a good way for me to try and to even support my community. Right.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([23:15](#)):

Proximity based advertising.

Lucas Sevathian ([23:16](#)):

Exactly. And so this is like, proximity is one of the three main like competitive advantage we put forward. 'cause there's no app on the market that that's like this. There's no, uh, even like concept like this. So this is our real strength. And the deal also is something super efficient because compared to big corporations like McDonald, they do a lot of deals in combo meals that are especially affordable for students, uh, in many countries. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, they're looking for affordable deals. So right now we're talking about maybe a good way for small restaurants to have a concept or something to still perform, like not too much losses Mm-Hmm. Due to fresh products or something, while being able to reach out to a, to a community

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([23:54](#)):

And be able to compete with those much bigger corporations who, who are using that, um, scalability piece to be able to cut their prices. Exactly. Yeah. So let's talk, uh, about Aware Adventures then in terms of bringing your people in and getting to critical mass and how you plan to monetize with Aware Adventures. Yeah,

Jake Shriver ([24:11](#)):

So monetization wise, um, we've really been looking at a subscription based service. Um, the biggest thing is it is a tool and we understand that, you know, if you were to bring your child into counseling, uh, you know, there's, it's very expensive. It's one of those things that, you know, if it's, it's needed and it's a price that you have to pay because, um, you know, um, it's, it's something that has to happen. Um, but really we've been kind of looking at grants in some ESOs around South Carolina. I know that, um, the, uh, SC Commerce can't actually give money directly to private entities, but they can, you know, help pay for things like consulting through like three phase grants, um, or trips and international trade missions and stuff like that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, um, we haven't like dived too deep into it, but that's kind of the track that we've been on. Um, you know, um, bootstrapping through, um, different websites and trying to build just awareness through social media, um, has also been, uh, one, one thing that we've done as well. We have a website up right now awareadventures.org. Um, but really we think that the best best thing that we can do is just offer, um, an affordable subscription rate of 9 99 a month. So, you know, that's 120 bucks a year. And we also offer, you know, um, some discounts based on, you know, if they were to buy the yearly upfront, you know, we take away, you know, maybe like 40% or something to kind of Mm-Hmm. Incentivize parents to just go ahead and see like, okay. And commit, if I do this for

one year, is this going to help my child? Right. Right. So, um, really right now, that's, that's where we're at. Um, you know, looking for some sort of like, um, incubation company that really can help us build like a full stack. You know, um, we, we did have a prototype developed, but obviously, you know, giving that to another developer isn't gonna do much. You have to kind of start from scratch. Um, but that's where we're at right now. And, um, funding wise. So

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([26:03](#)):

When I think about the opportunity for Aware Adventures, a lot of it is in that subscription based model being that parents can pay $120 for a year for unlimited access to this app, that the kids already wanna be on the phone, they already wanna be playing with something, they already wanna be engaged in some kind of game. Right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so now you're paying that instead of paying $120 per visit to a clinical psychologist. Yeah. So let me ask you this. If I'm putting my kid in counseling, there's some risk there associated with whether or not the counselor is knowledgeable about what they're doing, whether or not the counselor is guiding them or pushing them in one direction or the other. There's some, there's been a lot of conversation lately some books published about over influence of counselors and mental health professionals who are maybe, um, helping kids. They, they believe they're helping kids to be aware of their emotions, but in fact, making those kids so hyper aware of their emotions, that that's all they're thinking about is their emotions instead of sort of, you know, rub some dirt in it. Yeah. Like the way Gen X came up. Right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, when we think about, like really having no concept of what your emotional needs were at all, because there just was no nurture for that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> versus being so hyper nurtured over your emotional needs that you're paralyzed by anything that could happen because you're worried about emotional damage. A hundred percent. So is there a way that can, first of all, like what, where's the roots of Aware Adventures interventions here? Like in terms of how does Aware Adventures Psychology say like, Hey, this is something to pay attention to. Or is it just raw data collection that you're putting forward to the parents to say, you guys do with this what you want, but this is what the kid told us.

Jake Shriver ([27:45](#)):

So mostly it's, it's gonna be raw data collection because obviously the parent knows best for their child. Um, I think that we, we could utilize some tools, um, to, you know, maybe offer some sort of next step, maybe

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([27:57](#)):

Some resources.

Jake Shriver ([27:58](#)):

Exactly. Um, but I think, you know, with how artificial intelligence works, it's probably a, you know, a risk to, you know, say like, okay, we put this, you know, script base into Aware Adventures, there's obviously some problems that can come into because it, artificial intelligence is not always correct. Right. Um, you know, it's, it's based off our language, not, you know, our philosophies. So it's, it's very, it's a very weird thing. I think that being in between, you know, not knowing anything at all and then being hyper analyzed is where Aware Adventures is that kind of like, just soft spot in the middle. Um,

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([28:34](#)):

I think there's two really big options here. The first is inquisitiveness, ask the kid the questions, right? Yep. Exactly. And then the second is the prescriptive, which is, okay, based on what you told us, here's a

couple things we think might work. Like go outside. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So talk a little bit about that prescriptive piece. Where does that come from? How do we know that this is the right thing to suggest?

Jake Shriver ([28:53](#)):

Yeah, so really it just stems from our main prompts. So when we have some kids say, you know, I didn't have fun at school today. Um, you know, it really is going to be going into a complete Lambda database. So this is basic coding to where like, we have all of the API information. Um, this is where, you know, the developers are gonna come in and make sure that whatever age group that child is, 4, 5, 6, you know, they're gonna have, um, responses that are based on something they'd actually like to do. And will also be able to, when the child signs up, the parent's able to, you know, enter in like all of their their interests, their likes, all of these things that we're able to use to then say, Hey, maybe you should do one of your favorite things, like, like, you know, color, or maybe you should, you know, try

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([29:41](#)):

listening to music.

Jake Shriver ([29:41](#)):

Exactly. Yeah. And, um, that's, that's one of the really, really powerful parts of the application is that being able to, you know, um, go directly towards the interest of the child is going to help them feel like the avatar is really listening to them and able to, you know, prompt them to do the right things if they're, you know, feeling sad or, you know, continue to be on the right path.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([30:03](#)):

So I love the opportunity for integrations as well. So like, as soon as I said that, like listening to music, I was like, how do you not integrate Aware Adventures with Spotify and then queue up their favorite playlist or queue up the Happy Dance list? So Right opportunities, so many opportunities there. And I think Peak Tew probably has the same piece, right? Like if you're already on your phone and there's multiple applications that are there, where are the APIs where we can say, Hey, this is gonna prompt you to go here or there? Uh, my favorite one that I'm working right now is Shazam and Spotify, which is, uh, how I'm adding song. We're doing a like Song of the Day playlist in our family, and I always forget. And so then I'll be listening to a song and be like, oh, Shazam that song, and then there's Spotify right there, and then I can add it right to my playlist. Like that API is so useful to me as just a, a basic phone user that I wonder like it's gonna be ubiquitous to our kids and our young adults who are that used to all these interactions between these different apps.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([30:57](#)):

All right. Let's talk about pitch competitions in general. So not your first rodeo, Jake, you went through SC Innovates last spring and as a contestant for SC Innovates, you are, uh, aware Adventures made it to the top 10 out of 120 applications. And then you were able to go to the actual event at, uh, the Growth Summit and you went through a round of small pitches where you were just in front of three judges. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and those three judges put up the top five, I think. Yes. Uh, but you get, did you guys didn't make the top five?

Jake Shriver ([31:31](#)):

We, I don't think we made the top five. We were very, very close. I know for a fact we made the top 10. Um, it was a really, really awesome process. Um, it was, I was really nervous. I remember, you know, getting in there and we had, I was with my team, Keely, Connor and Mary Grace and, um, Lindsay who graduated, and we were just like, well, I feel like we've prepared enough as long as we just over don't overthink it and just, you know, say what we've worked on and just execute our problem and what our solution is. Um, give a little background of where our funding is, you know, our addressable markets. Um, I think we'll be okay. And we went in there and we did a really good job. Um, I definitely feel like there's one thing we could have improved on. Um, I think that we were a little bit behind on understanding how much money we would really need to, to run the application. So, you know, looking at like how many servers we need to have to keep all the data, um, you know, actually having the application on an app store costs upwards of like 2000 bucks a month Wow. For a lot of these different platforms. And we were not aware of that. So we had some of the judges that actually were marketers and um, had background in that scenario that were able to give us some really good insights. So that's definitely, um, I'm, I'm glad that that happened, but it definitely deducted us some points, um, you know, under our, um, the feasibility part with our funding path. Um, but it was a really great learning experience and I know what I need to do this time. Uh, so, um, yeah, it was, it was a lot of fun. Um, definitely was nervous at first, but once I got in there I was just like, boom, let's do it. Yeah. And it worked out great. So,

Dr. Kasie Whitener (33:10):

So this is a project you're really passionate about, it's easier to talk about something you're really passionate about. And then you took that success from SC Innovates and had the confidence to go for Proving Ground, which is a much smaller competition. It's inside the Moore School. Well, it's really on campus at the University of South Carolina, but it's only open to South Carolina students. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> or South Carolina recent grads, like within the last five years. So it is a relatively, it's a much smaller pool of competitors. Uh, I think this year for Proving Ground, we ended up with about 50 or 60 applications. So that's about half as many as we got at SC Innovates. And now you've made the top 10 here, you're a semifinalist for Proving Ground. This afternoon we're gonna do the workshop where we'll go and video record your pitches. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And then those pitches will go to the judges and we'll narrow down from this 11, this pool of 11 down to five, four or five that will actually pitch live on the 19th. Um, so you have an opportunity this afternoon to put your case forward on video and then the judges will decide who's gonna actually pitch live on the 19th. So what made you wanna do Proving Ground and what are you hoping to get outta the experience?

Jake Shriver (34:10):

So really my, my interest kind of piqued with proving ground, um, probably I'd say right after, um, SC Innovates because as soon as I knew that we didn't win, it just made me want to get out there more and figure out how can I get some my hands on some funding? 'cause like I know this is possible. Who do I need to meet? Who do I need to, you know, or how do I need to present myself to really make people understand that like this, this is possible. Right? Yeah. Um, and that's when I, you know, just sat down with Keely and Connor and I was just like, I mean, we're gonna be here another semester anyway. I mean, it's senior year. I think that it's best to, you know, not kick the bucket and just really keep moving because you know, we're gonna get hit with the real world either way. Right. So I think that uh, really it was just kind of a, like we already did one, why would I let this fall through the cracks? You know what I mean? Gotcha.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (35:03):

The opportunity just right in front of you can't, can't pass it up. So same thing Lucas, because you got here in December Yeah. Right. Started classes in January and then Proving Ground rolled o rolled open in February and you're like, Hey, I have an app, let's do a thing. So how does Proving Ground meet the goals that you and your Peak Tew team are looking to achieve?

Lucas Sevathian ([35:20](#)):

Right. So when we, when I arrived here, I was basically chasing a, this American dream of the child that was like, wow, the US is for entrepreneurs. And the reason that, uh, we actually applied for this contest was because it was the accomplishment of a year of work compared to actually your case. I didn't apply to a competition before 'cause I really wanted to have a concrete understanding of hundred percent exactly our market. I know that some teachers are saying go directly on the, the ground test your MVP because otherwise like it's the market's gonna go evolve fast. But the thing is Peak Tew is so abstract of the current market that if I don't have a concrete understanding, investors should remember whoever's gonna ask me a question that I wouldn't be able to answer. Yeah. And now through our business model that's like 99 pages or whatever kind of other appendixes we get, uh, I have the answers for that.

Lucas Sevathian ([36:10](#)):

So now that I'm ready, now that I have the answers for every kind of question we can ask me and that I'm able to precisely also narrow down to a specific minute, uh, pitch, um, decided to actually accomplish this, this mission to also reward my team to basically show them that they work is actually going somewhere. Uh, so it's above everything. I would say a motivation purpose, but it's also gonna be a way to network and show that no matter if it's faculty member or investors or whoever that we are becoming concrete, there's some serious reason to consider us. And as my CFO would actually probably ask me to say is to potentially find some investors to go to the next step. Because even though we have a cost optimization strategy, we still end up going to have, because that's gonna arise in the next coming year. So any money will be good to take

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([37:01](#)):

<laugh> any money would be good. I love the answer <laugh>, I just wanna be in the contest. Any money would be good. There's uh, two really big prizes available. The first one is the incubator downtown. The Boyd Innovation Center is offering a seat in their incubator for the winner. Of course Lucas won't be here 'cause you're leaving the country again. <laugh>. Yeah,

Lucas Sevathian ([37:22](#)):

Lucas, you can just gimme that if you want. Yeah, that's

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([37:24](#)):

Right. So that's one piece of it is then to work inside the incubator. And then the other one is Jason Scalzo, who we were lucky enough to spend some time with a week ago. Uh, he and his group are an online incubator and so it's not a physical location, it's something that can work from pretty much anywhere. So both of these big prizes for high growth, high tech companies that are entered in the Proving Ground. Proving Ground finals are on April 19th, uh, this year, 2024. And we are looking forward to having some live pitches available. It's the International Business School's 50th anniversary. So there's a huge party happening on April 19th. And we're, we've been invited to bring Proving Ground as part of that, which is super cool. So Nice. We just found out today that the International Business School has received number one again for the third year in a row, which is super fantastic.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (38:09):

Good for all of us to be associated with the Moore School, uh, as being, you know, such a well renowned, uh, place to be part of. So this'll be the last question then. What are you gonna do as you graduate? 'cause you're both kind of walking out the doors of education here within the next year or so. Are you going to continue to pursue Aware Adventures, Jake, is this something that you think is a side hustle until you can really get it up and going? Is it something you're gonna be able to dedicate yourself to or was this a school project and then we're gonna move on?

Jake Shriver (38:36):

So it's definitely, uh, aiming towards the side hustle. Um, so I've been applying to a lot of different, uh, jobs in Greenville. I want to move back in with my parents so that way I can, you know, save up money to actually fund the business. Um, so that's, that's definitely kind of my goal right now is to just look towards the people that can make this possible. Um, you know, whether I need to take out business loans or hopefully make sure my team is still very, you know, um, happy about the idea and able to, you know, progress with me. Um, that's a huge factor as well. Um, but really, uh, I'm still going to push, push towards it and I definitely don't want to see, see it just, you know, become another failed project that's, you know, it just makes me almost like cringe when I think about it that way. But I think there's a lot of possibilities.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (39:26):

There are a ton of possibilities if nothing else to license the tech to another company Exactly. That might be able to take it and grow it. So

Jake Shriver (39:32):

Yeah. Or pilot it to another company. Exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (39:34):

Yeah. Alright. And what about you Lucas, for Peak Tew? What's your f now you've got a team in place, right? And in your European counterparts. So what, what's next?

Lucas Sevathian (39:42):

First thing, there's no like failures, there's only learning in entrepreneurship. That's something we need to say, but uh, in terms of my plan is that compared to you, we're a bit younger, so we still have more or less a year. So until like, let's say June of next year, I'm able to be flexible and the rest of my team is before having to get a job. Uh, so our goal is to have still a custom optimization strategy to really boost, uh, our market as much as we can and then start paying wages to our team. So that will be maybe next year. If we're not able to make that, then it's gonna be another story. For now. The story is about, uh, still doing 24/7 Peak Tew, uh, on a daily basis. Uh, and moving forward, I guess continuing, especially this summer, testing the prototype, reaching out to influencers, uh, and basically growing. We actually got a deal, uh, with the Silicon Valley, so we have to, to reach 5,000 active users. So that's my goal for now. No other objective, but that.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (40:40):

Nice. It's good to hear that both of you're thinking about taking a project that was worked on an undergrad and building off of it. And I love what you said, Lucas, that there's no such thing as failure. It's

just learning. 'cause if it's not this venture, it might be the next one or the one after that. We have, I have really enjoyed hearing from the two of you and about these ventures. I'm really excited about your experience at Proving Ground. I know you're both gonna do fantastic in today's workshop and hopefully to the finals on the 19th, the More School is proud to have an entrepreneurship program that supports young entrepreneurs, individuals who want to achieve their own businesses, build their own ventures, and go out and try to really, it's the American dream, isn't it, uh, to, to run your own company. This has been the very first episode of our Moore School podcast, and I'm just gonna leave it with the tagline, which is, when you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.