

# Far away, yet so near: App lets kids, distant loved ones read together

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Helping military families enjoy story time together was the inspiration for Caribu, an app enabling children and their loved ones far away to read together.

Caribu started out as a class project in London. Alvaro Sabido's MBA classmates at Imperial College in London went their separate ways after commencement, and Sabido later decided to develop it into a company and form a team in Miami, where he grew up. It took him five months, until fall of 2016, to find Maxeme Tuchman, former executive director for Teach For America in Miami-Dade, who joined as the CEO. They met through an online co-founder matchmaker service.

Caribu marries video calling and e-books to provide an interactive children's storytime experience when family members are far apart, whether it is parents legally separated, traveling for work or in the military, a grandparent staying connected or teachers using Caribu for remote tutoring. The users simply make a call, choose a book together, and read or draw in real-time - as if they were in the same room.

Features such as a pointer and magnifying glass facilitate the experience. Users of the app can choose from a library of more than 200 children's storybooks and educational workbooks in multiple languages, the team said in their plan.

Caribu won third place in the Miami Herald Business Plan Challenge Community Track, scoring particularly high for value proposition and

team experience. The entry combines education-tech and social impact, two trends the Miami Herald saw throughout the entry pool this year.

The Caribu app is free. The company currently makes money through in-app purchases of the books. Its customers are military members on active duty, business travelers, parents who work late, grandparents and other loved ones who can't always be at home for story time. Caribu's largest market is the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and China, said Sabido, who is the CTO.

This summer, Caribu will be changing over to a monthly [subscription model](#). "It's a better value for our users but it also allows us to provide subscriptions for organizations. We're talking to a large hotel chain, large mentoring organizations, children's hospitals and military organizations," Tuchman said.

Also on the roadmap for later this year: Embedding a sharper focus on teaching literacy into the app.

"The feedback we get from parents is that they feel like the literacy apps make them feel like bad parents or that they need to have a master's degree in literacy and be the official teacher," said Tuchman, a former Miami-Dade Public Schools teacher and White House Fellow.

"They are the child's first teacher, but they need guidance, not an instruction manual. The literacy piece will be embedded in that just by using Caribu, you know that your child's literacy proficiency will be increasing because of all the embedded literacy tools within the app."

The company is fund-raising and has been scoring on the contest circuit, winning the Harvard Business School New Venture Competition for the Southeast region. It's also a finalist for the Teach for America Social Innovation Award, was a finalist in the Milken-Penn GSE Education

Business Plan Competition and pitched at the Collision startup conference recently. Caribu will be participating in the Florida Early-Stage Capital Conference and the eMerge Americas Startup Showcase.

When they aren't on the road exhibiting at tradeshow or pitching at conferences, Tuchman and Sabido and two interns work at CIC Miami, a co-working hub for entrepreneurs, where they have found support and guidance.

"Moving to the subscription model and building the [literacy](#) piece will allow the growth trajectory we have been planning for," Tuchman said. "It's been a whirlwind but that's the startup life."

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